





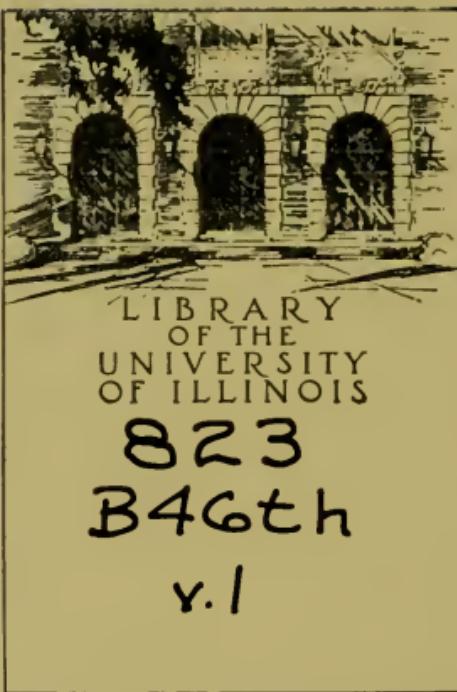
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# THIS SON OF VULCAN.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHORS OF

"READY-MONEY MORTIBOY," "MY LITTLE GIRL,"  
"WITH HARP AND CROWN," "THE CASE OF MR. LUCRAFT,"  
"THE GOLDEN BUTTERFLY," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE & RIVINGTON,  
CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.

1876.

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LONDON :  
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS,  
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

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PREFACE.

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In sending out this, the fifth of our series of novels, we are anxious to say a few words of preface. The works which precede "This Son of Vulcan" have been reproduced, principally by pirates, in America, Canada, India, Victoria, and South Australia. As regards America, we desire to express our sense of the honourable treatment we have received from Messrs. Osgood, of Boston; and if we only considered the advantage of widening indefinitely our circle of readers, we ought also to express our gratitude for the treatment we have received from our friends the pirates. The sale of a three-volume novel thus does not represent the circulation, because the readers of all those papers which have done us the honour of unlicensed reproduction are like the midges of the river-side for multitude. But there are other considerations besides notoriety. And, with these before us, we are not grateful. It was perhaps kind in one honourable gentleman, who runs

a paper in New York, to reprint "My Little Girl" in his journal, even though he changed the title to "The Mulatto's Son, or the Stain of Blood;" but we cannot altogether forgive him for printing it, as if it was a comedy from the French, as an entirely new and original piece, written expressly for his paper. We are waiting, also, for proofs of the repentance of that Canadian editor who sent us word, on expostulation, that we might bring an action against him and be blanked, but that, meantime, he intended to go on reprinting our novel. We did not bring that action, and he did go on with the novel. Again, we shall perhaps never know what atonement the Melbourne editor who infringed our copyright may be willing to make. And we remind the proprietors of a certain agricultural journal in Adelaide, and an Indian weekly which shall be nameless, that the eighth commandment is still supposed to be binding. Meantime, as these reproductions of novels take place every day in Greater Britain, to the serious loss and injury of writers, we most earnestly beg any of our readers who may notice one of our novels in a colonial paper to forward us, through our publishers, a copy of the journal. The *Toronto Globe* is, at present, the only colonial paper with which we have made arrangements.

We have next to express our best thanks to the

kindly critics who have reviewed our books. They have given us more favourable notices than we could have hoped or even wished ; and, on the whole, their fault-finding, now that we can look back on a past book as if it was the work of somebody else, was fair and just. In one or two little points we still keep our own opinion. The pretended marriage in "My Little Girl" was said to be impossible. Very well : a year after the novel appeared, a case was reported in the papers which exactly reproduced all our details, and might have been copied from our pages. And the *girl in real life was deceived, in just the same manner as the girl in fiction.* So, again, the character of Dicky Carew was said to be taken from that of Dick Swiveller. It was not. Dicky was a real character : his real life, somewhat softened, because it was a life of degradation and failure, far worse than we dared to draw, is sketched in the novel of "With Harp and Crown," with certain incidents which actually befell him. But the end is altered. The real Dicky, after losing through drunkenness the two or three small literary posts which he held, went upon the stage at Drury Lane as a super, wore armour, carried a banner, and in this occupation died of drink. One critic has also accused us of using "mock slang" in the early part of this present novel. Perhaps it is mock slang, but it is the exact language used by the persons from whom we

received the information which enabled us to write these chapters. For all the characters in them are real, and sometimes not even the names are changed. The incidents in "This Son of Vulcan" are not inventions, and some of the persons whose experience is here embodied are still living. The real Cardiff Jack is dead, and he died, we are sorry to say, like the real Dicky Carew, of intemperance. The Bastables are well known to all spiritualists and miracle-mongers under their real name : people will show you in the North of England a man who has the marvellous power which Jack Armstrong acquired : Captain Perrymont still casts nativities, and labours to transmute metals : Cuolahan, who has kept the temperance pledge for five and twenty years, is hale and hearty, in spite of his sixty summers : and we are very much mistaken if we did not meet Mrs. Merrion only yesterday in Regent Street, about four o'clock in the afternoon.

W. B. }  
J. R. }

## PART THE FIRST.



# THIS SON OF VULCAN.

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## PROLOGUE.

### I.

THE place is Esbrough, a rising—not yet risen—town in the north of England. The time is eleven o'clock, on the last night of the year 1849.

Myles Cuolahan, standing on the steps of the Packhorse and Talbot public-house, recognises his acquaintance, Mr. Paul Bayliss, who is passing down the High Street on his way home. Seizing him in a very friendly manner by the arm, he gives him “Good evening.”

“Ay, ay! good night, Myles; good night,”

says Bayliss, trying to pass on, and with the roughness of one who does not wish to be stopped; but the strong fingers that clutch the sleeve of his rough pilot-coat hold him too tightly; he cannot slip from their grasp.

“Ye’ll not have the heart to say no to a glass of just whativer ye like best with Myles Cuolahan this night, Misther Bayliss; an’ if ye do, I’ll not belave ye, nor be the mane man to tak’ ye at your word nayther. So there!” he cries, making a move of a yard or so in the direction of mine host of the Packhorse’s snug red-curtained parlour.

There is a suspicion of mellowness in the tone of voice in which Bayliss’s captor says this; and Bayliss replies—

“But you must let me say no, and thank ye with it, Cuolahan, lad . . .”

“It’s New Year’s Eve,” urges Myles, never relaxing his grip of Bayliss’s coat sleeve, “an’ divil’s the bit o’ luck ye’ll have the year to come, Misther Bayliss, if ye don’t have one glass of whisky wi’ me on this present occasion.”

A shrewd observer, noting the look on the Englishman’s face as the Irishman said this,

would probably have inferred that the goddess Fortune could not well treat Paul Bayliss worse in the year to come, than she had done in the year past. Which, indeed, was nearly true.

"Ye'll come into the Packhorse?" said Myles.

"No, no, Cuolahan," Bayliss persisted; "I'll not take another glass this year: and I'll just remind you, my lad, you've got the walk to Back End before you, and if you like to walk with me as far as I go, I'll be glad of your company; and if not, I'll wish you a happy new year when it comes, and say good night."

"Tell that to the marines for a tale, Misther Bayliss," cried Myles; "ye'll not be for Back End yet."

"Yes, but I shall," said Bayliss, sinking his voice to the tone of a confidential whisper. "You see, Myles, if I'm out many seconds after our kitchen clock strikes eleven, either on New Year's Eve or any other eve, we don't want vinegar with our cabbage for a week after. My sister Barbara is, I suppose, about as near perfection as a mortal Methodist can be. Now you understand."

He tapped Myles playfully on the shoulder, and freed himself from his grasp.

Under the lamp at the street-door of the Packhorse and Talbot Myles Cuolahan winked a wink of passing comprehension. Then he responded to Bayliss's invitation to walk home with him.

"Misther Bayliss," he said, "I'd come out just to take a momentary peep at the stars and all the other heavenly bodies—including, av coarse, the planets and the comets—when who should I see but yourself, looking as brave as the best of them; an' what would I do in dacency but ask you to step in and dhrink a glass with me? It's hard that you won't, on you and on me. But I am not the boy to be after getting you into trouble with a lady—least of all Miss Barbara Bayliss. Bless her purty eyes!—if they are purty, which I don't rightly remember. An', thank-ing you all the same, I'll not want for company home as far as I go, an' farther. Johnny's inside"—pointing over his shoulder. "Some-body 'll have to see Johnny home to his own door, an' it's likely I'll be the man."

As Cuolahan finished speaking, there was a

shuffling noise of footsteps on the stone floor of the passage. Both Myles and Bayliss looked round, as the Company, in the form of "P: Bayliss and Co., Ironfounders, General and Jobbing Smiths, etc., etc., Holcotes, near Esbrough," came slowly but surely into the full light of the lamp which hung over the door of the inn, and advertised boldly, in red glass and white letters, those neat wines and genuine spirits the said Company loved too well.

The mood of the Company, as convoyed by two boon fellows he reached the threshold, was thickly sportive.

"What—sort—of—night . . . eh, Myles?" he asked, in seven very deliberate jerks, before he steadied himself against the door-post.

"Hould your whisht, Johnny: here's Bayliss!" said Cuolahan, in his friend's ear.

The Company, whose faculties were not at their brightest, had failed to notice the presence of the head of the firm. Cuolahan's hint fell short of its purpose also; for Johnny Armstrong only said, "Eh?" with a very wide sense of interrogation generally. "We're going down to the Yorkshire Grey. Let him come if he likes."

"Johnny," said Myles, giving his friend a good shake, "you don't hear me. Look round you, man ; it's Misther Bayliss."

Johnny being now made to understand, suddenly lost his jovial tone, and became absurdly dignified.

He looked sulkily at his partner, and resented with some spirit the uncalled-for innuendo conveyed in the offer of a friendly arm to support him.

But his legs most inopportunely spoke the truth in the plainest language ; and having served him this shabby trick, left him at the mercy of Cuolahan and Bayliss, who, taking his arm in theirs, turned his back for him on the Yorkshire Grey and the convoy who had brought him from the parlour of the Pack-horse, and walked him off in the direction of Marsh Road, a mile and a half away in the outskirts of Esbrough. Their way led through the town, where, though it was eleven o'clock, the shops were ablaze with gas, and thronged with customers.

For it is Friday night, and the streets, which at Christmas time are almost like a fair, are crowded with buyers and lookers-on ;

people with baskets, and good folk who have come out to stare about them, see the sights in the shop-windows, enjoy the bustle, hear the politic patter of Cheap Jack, and spend divers pence, one at a time, for the privilege of an interview with the "Giant American Sisters, the Fattest Women in the World," the largest horse ever known, the curious blue ring-tailed "Gorilla Ape from Central Africay," and other vaunted celebrities of the market-place.

Being still Christmas time, everything to eat is bedecked with holly, and the darkest shops are bright with unaccustomed lights. In the by-streets, New Year's Eve is kept in every house where there are children or old people: kept mostly in the simple fashion of something extra to eat and drink. In the public-houses, that orthodox tribe, the topers, who neglect no privileged occasion of rejoicing, keep the feast after their own manner, and as they keep every feast, saint's day or holiday, either of State or Church, by making it a day more than usually unholy. It is a night when the pulse of the noisy little manufacturing town, always quick and active, beats

fierce and feverish. For generally, as becomes a young town whose future is all before it, by eleven o'clock its lights are put out, and the workers are in bed and asleep, and nothing is left stirring but the policeman who keeps watch and ward.

The stream of people in the streets is already setting homeward, but not before the butchers' shops have been pretty nearly cleared of the great piles of yellow and red meat, on which Esbrough housewives look with loving but critical eyes ; not before the grocer, wiping his brow, has remarked, with a sober joy that will lend a brightness to next Sunday's services, the lightness of his shelves and the fulness of his till ; not before the fruiterer has got rid of those pyramids of golden oranges, bursting figs, brown nuts, and rosy apples, which will form the children's feast of the morrow.

As Cuolahan and Bayliss, with their staggering charge, pass through the full streets, they meet plenty of people they know. But Johnny Armstrong's ways are familiar, and they only remark to each other—

“ It's Johnny : they're taking him home.”

Observe, that it is a bad sign when a man past thirty is called by the diminutive Christian name that belongs to a boy. Armstrong the toper—for he had no other occupation—was, with all the world except his wife, “Johnny,” and nothing else. In the last ten years he had been steadily drinking, drinking and singing songs, had done no manner of work, got no money and cared to get none. People began to whisper that Johnny Armstrong was coming to the end of his resources ; it was even said that he had begun to raise money by means of the house with the three golden balls. And his wife was growing more and more careful as the inevitable day of destitution drew near.

“It’s Johnny Armstrong going home. Happy New Year, all three ! Johnny’s drunk as usual. A pretty New Year he’ll spend, poor fellow !”

Ay. Another New Year’s Day would be his. For it was the last time he was to stagger home.

Johnny Armstrong had sung his last song, smoked his last pipe, drained his last glass, and was staggering blindly down the street to meet his miserable doom—drunk.

They left the town behind them and walked along the road in the open country. In the fields it was a clear, cold Christmas night; the stars as bright as on that eve when the angels sang their song—the only song of heaven ever heard on earth, and the shepherds listened and wondered with hearts that burned within them; one of those nights when the world seems to have forgotten its troubles and to be at peace for ever; when you might wander abroad like the great Sheikh Abraham, listening and waiting for the word of the Lord. To him it came in a Voice; to us it comes in a restful calm and trust.

But the holy stillness of the night found no reflection in the hearts of the three men as they walked along the frost-bound road. The one idea that possessed Armstrong was that of making Bayliss believe that nobody was so much surprised at the unreasonable refusal of his legs to carry him steadily as their owner was himself. As if Bayliss was ignorant of his partner's weaknesses! Bayliss, cogitating of the hopelessly insolvent state of the firm of which he was the head and Armstrong the tail, speculated on his chance of getting rid

of Johnny without an hour's delay, and then wheedling his sister out of another loan; or making a new appearance in the *Gazette*. Myles Cuolahan's conscience smote him hard for having left an appreciative company of particularly jolly fellows just as the ball was rolling fastest, and his sense of what was decent in the way of behaviour being thus outraged by his own wilful act, the light-hearted Celt was as gloomy as Myles could be. So, without having interchanged many words by the way, they leave Johnny at the wicket-gate of his little garden at Back End. He staggers up the path alone. His wife, who is waiting up for him, hearing his well-known footsteps on the stones outside, springs to her feet and runs to open the door. It is no new sight to her, this of her husband's slow and heavy entry. She is not surprised when he sits at the table and, leaning his head upon his hands, falls sound asleep. She goes on quickly with her work, her thin nimble fingers setting stitch after stitch. Not even a sigh—not even a reproach: for this wife has passed all that. She is tied to a drunkard, and she knows

that her fate is beyond all hope. Other men may change. The passionate man may grow calm and long-suffering; the wilful man may listen kindly to the voice of reason; the selfish man may—I have never known a case, but he may—learn to feel sympathy for others; the cruel man become softened; the malicious man may become generous; the nervous, contented; the improvident man may take to the ways of thrift: but the drunkard never improves. For him there is but one remedy; and since he seldom takes it, there is but one end—misery, shame, an unhonoured and premature old age. Look at Johnny Armstrong as he sleeps in his chair! In those swelling veins, that red and bloated face, that hair grey too soon, would you recognize the handsome young fellow, the last of the Armstrong race, owners of Esbrough for seven hundred years, who brought home with him, ten years ago, his bonny bride from the Border country, where the Armstrongs first came from? How handsome he was then! How hopeful was the household! How full of projects was its master, for the restoration of the fallen Armstrong fortunes!

And for her, his wife, who can tell the tragedy of a life wasted and hopes shattered ? There is no tragedy in history, no drama of the Greek stage, grander, more sublime, more full of pity, and terror, than that of a woman's life, as the hero of her youthful love slowly, bit by bit—not letting fall a borrowed drapery, but adding others to his own features, putting out new and hideous limbs as a tree puts forth new branches—develops into a monster like the laidly worm of Dunstanburgh. It is a tragedy which has never been written, perhaps because we see it before us every day. Some day, another Shakespeare shall put it on the stage for us.

"I am going to bed, John," she said at last, as the clock struck one, shaking him by the shoulder.

He looked up, shook his head and went to sleep again. She put away her work, raked out the last embers of the fire, took away the candle and went upstairs.

At two, Johnny Armstrong woke again, stupid, cold, trying to think.

"Bayliss," he said—"Bayliss is to come to-morrow to pay his rent." Then he struck

a match and looked about for the candle. Then he slipped something from his pocket and stooped to find it. The light dropped out of his hand, his head grew heavy as lead, and he lay along the floor insensible and breathing stertorously.

Presently a little wreath of light smoke crept stealthily upwards, as if avoiding the sleeper's face; then there came a dull-red glow, visible, had Johnny Armstrong's eyes been open, which they were not, between the boards of the carpetless floor where the lighted match had fallen; then the glow brightened into a broad light with crackling and sputtering of wood, for the laths of the ceiling were on fire, and in the kitchen below the flame was running out tongues of fire here and there, that caught the wainscoting of the old house, crept behind the wall with the whispered hiss of a serpent, and mounted higher and higher, intent to destroy, but resolved upon silence till the moment for decisive action arrived. The woman slept upstairs, dreaming of her Northumbrian home or of the unborn child.

Downstairs her husband, Johnny Armstrong, lay snoring loudly, too drunk for any dreams.

Fire ! fire ! The flames were roaring and screaming as they devoured the last rafter of Johnny Armstrong's cottage, and what had been, an hour before, a man with his infinite possibilities was now an impossible heap of ashes, useless for ever !

When the clock struck three the terrified people, some dozen or so from the neighbouring works, were carrying to the nearest place of shelter, the works themselves, for no other house stood near Johnny Armstrong's, the one thing saved from the fire—his wife. Two or three women followed the men as they bore her, helpless and swooning, from the scene of the disaster. The town was asleep. Too late help came. The bright light in the sky above Armstrong's house had quite faded out before the engine started from Esbrough.

"Lay her in the foundry—it is the only place," said one.

They spoke in whispers ; for in face of a great calamity, we are in a kind of church, conscious of our own weakness, recognising, in spite of ourselves, the dangers that surround us. She opened her eyes and moaned. They made haste to lay her down on some

rough bed extemporised out of workmen's coats. It was a long, low shed, lit here and there by flaming gas jets, roofed with a great glass arch, of which half the panes were broken, those, namely, at the upper end where the furnace stood, and through the broken glass you might watch, if you looked up—though these men never did look up—the tranquil stars gazing upon the scene. And you might fancy they gazed with a sort of curiosity, as if here was a noticeable thing in the world's history. Noticeable indeed, though it happens every day, for a child was to be born, and a woman was to die. The working men never looked round, hearing and seeing nothing but the surly roaring of the furnace, and watching for the moment to begin the pouring out. In front of the fire, dressed in some rough wraps, kept wet, were those whose duty it was to guide the streaming mass of molten metal into the ladles, great iron buckets with huge handles, which stood ready to receive it when the time should come; and close at hand were the moulds, long prisons as they seemed, cut regularly in the floor.

Johnny Armstrong's wife they had laid at

the other end of the shed. She was left alone with the women behind a rude screen of canvas and shawls. Presently, these gathered close round her under the gas flame over their heads.

"John," she murmured faintly, with lips that grew whiter every moment, "John, dear John, don't drink it all; leave something for the baby and me. Leave something, John."

John would drink no more; but that she did not know. They laid her baby by her side. She revived for a moment to kiss the new-born cheek, so soft, so fragile; then she looked round her, and saw the women bending over her. All was strange to her in these last moments when life was ebbing away.

"It's a boy, dear," said one, "a beautiful boy."

"Try to bear up; poor thing!" said another, in kindly accents.

But she lay back on the rough bed quite still, and they saw she was dead.

"Let be; let be!" said a man, Miles Cuolahan, no other; his face was blackened, his

hair singed, and clothes torn, and his hand bleeding. "My Biddy will take the child. 'Twill do instead of the little one we buried last week. God bless him!"

Presently came the doctor, too late. By this time the iron, molten, was pouring out from the furnace in a white stream into the ladles. As they dragged them to the moulds it streamed across the floor in rivulets of silver.

"Strong!" cried the woman who held the child; "he's the strongest baby I ever handled. Give me another pin, and he'll be beautiful. To think, poor lamb, that his mother only just had time to set her eyes on him!"

"The mother is dead," said the doctor, though they knew that already. "Poor thing! the fright has killed her. Where is her drunken husband?"

Nobody answered for a while.

"Myles Cuolahan saved her," said one, pointing to the shrinking hero, who had that night performed a deed worthy to be chronicled among the gests even of the London Fire Brigade; "but her husband was not in the bed-room."

"Perhaps he never went home."

"But he did; he was taken home to his own door."

"Then he——"

"He's dead," said Myles. "Burned in the fire, he is. Poor Johnny Armstrong! The drink was in him, and he hadn't the sense to get out."

The doctor shook his head and looked at the speaker, who turned away his face uneasily, for he read in the doctor's eyes the warning to himself that was left unspoken.

"Come, come," he said, turning to the woman who held the child, "we must see after the living. Now then, Mrs. Cuolahan, let us . . ."—he glanced at the furnace, the streaming metal, the men of the night shift, the lurid light that played upon the poor helpless bundle in the woman's arms, and hesitated for a moment—"now then, let us look at this Son of Vulcan."

## II.

FIVE AND TWENTY years ago ill news flew as fast at Esbrough as at places more and less important. But it was nearly breakfast-time with Paul Bayliss when the news of Johnny Armstrong's death reached him : for the simple reason that nobody thought of starting off to fetch him, in the excitement of the fire and the anxiety of the scene that followed it. So Bayliss snored while his partner and his partner's house were perishing. But the morning brought the news to him. A puddler from the works came over to his sister's house to tell him, as it was argued among the men, that he was one of those who "ought to know." Not that it was felt he could do anything in particular pending the coroner's inquest, but, in general terms, the opinion was expressed that he should be told. The volunteer who arrived with the message did not even get thanks for his pains. Bayliss was too much moved by his news to be punctilious in the matter of the minor civilities. In one second he was out of bed. In six minutes he was striding along at

a swinging pace to the scene of the catastrophe.

We have to see more of him, and may describe him at once.

Paul Bayliss is now a man of about thirty years of age—the same age as his partner, Johnny Armstrong, dead and gone. He is a man rather below the middle height, fresh-coloured, healthy, vigorous of appearance. Perhaps his eyes are too small and too close together ; perhaps it is his chin, which is coarse and full ; perhaps it is something about his mouth, which is large, and generally a little open ; perhaps it is the redness of his hair and whiskers ; perhaps it is his big, heavy nose ; perhaps it is the presence of all these features together, which gives the impression that Paul Bayliss would be a man of passably good looks, if something were not in the way. He is not a handsome man, nor is he even prepossessing. On the other hand, he has a free, open way with him. He laughs loudly ; he tells a story ; he is always ready to say the proper thing that stands for sympathy ; he can sing a good song ; he can drink with any man of his inches, and does too, when he gets the

chance of doing it for nothing. He is affable to every one. He never forgets a face, to commit which fault has brought thousands of short-sighted men to grief. He pays his way as far as he can, and would wish to owe no man anything. And yet, with all these admirable qualities, Paul is not popular. To be sure, he has had, as he is never tired of saying, luck dead against him. To be only thirty, and to have failed as a blacksmith and implement-maker, the trade to which he was brought up—as a farmer and seedsman, the trade which he tried next—and as an auctioneer and estate agent; and now, to be in a bad way as a farmer and jobbing smith, shows a malignity of fate against which few men could struggle. At the same time, there are not wanting those who say that Paul Bayliss has only himself to thank; that he had good chances, and that, if he could have kept out of the way of Johnny Armstrong, and the seductions of his convivial set, he would not have failed in any of his undertakings, and might have been a well-to-do man by this time. But, with all this, he was still a hopeful man, and had one answer always ready for the “candid” remarks of

friends : " You wait till I turn up trumps." To the friends it seemed that the turn of his suit never came. Candour compelled them to express a pious doubt that it ever would come. Such was Paul Bayliss at the time my story begins. We left him, with busy mind and quick strides, making the best of his way to the hot ashes of Johnny Armstrong's roof-tree.

A mile on his way was a point where three roads met. He came to a stop. After all, four blackened walls and a heap of charred débris could have nothing more to tell him than he knew already. Myles Cuolahan, on the other hand, might know a good deal more. He had learned from the messenger the brave part played by the Irishman, and he took the road that led to Myles's habitation. He came presently to a row of small two-storey houses, all exactly alike, all with green doors, green shutters, white blinds, only some of them whiter than others ; all bearing an air of meekness and dependence, which proclaimed the fact that they were occupied by the employés at the works. Even at this early hour their tenants, heads of the families, were away at

the factory. The door of the first, like all the rest, stood hospitably back, and opened, as is the practice of such doors, upon the living-room. In this room—his throat tied round with a red silk handkerchief, dressed in a thick pea-jacket, rusty black hat, and a dilapidated pair of trousers, such duds and gleanings in the way of clothes as his friends could lend him to replace the garments destroyed by the fire—sat Myles Cuolahan. Myles—a little man, thin and spare, with a sharp, clear-cut nostril, black eyes as bright as beads and as clear as a bell, crisp curly black hair, thin cheeks, and a long straight chin—was sitting on an inverted box, his own pack-box, in front of the fire; in his lips was a pipe, but it was empty; and in his arms—Bayliss noticed it with great surprise—hugged by about the biggest pair of hands that ever belonged to man, was a baby; and to the baby—a tiny creature, wrapped and swathed in flannel, with its little face sleepily turned upwards—Myles was singing, in a high-toned voice that might have been heard miles off, some sort of nonsense, a reminiscence of his native country and his own childish days:—

"A turf and a clod  
Spells Nabuchod ;  
A knife and a razor  
Spells Nabuchodnezzar ;  
A silver spoon and a gold ring  
Spells Nabuchodnezzar the king ;  
An old pair of slippers, and a new pair of shoes,  
Spells Nabuchodnezzar the king of the Jews."

As for the tune, it was a queer old Irish melody. Moore never heard it, fortunately, and so you will not find it in those five big volumes, where there is so much sweet old music, and so much sugary, brand-new sentiment. I heard an imitation of it myself the other day, played and sung by a young lady, to some affecting words about loye and parting, which made me laugh, because I thought of Myles and Nabuchod.

He beat time to the music with his right hand, keeping the left leg a foot and a half or so above the ground, so as to preserve the equilibrium of the baby. Paul Bayliss moved softly towards him.

"A turf and a clod spells Nabuchod.

Thim's Irish hieroglyphics, Masther Johnny Armstrong. There's Egyptian hieroglyphics, too ; but I'll tell ye all about thim when you

get older and I get wiser. Faith, now, ye see, there's room for improvement for both of us. Don't shut your eyes again, ye little devil. The strongest babby I ever see. Keep 'em wide open, for manners, while I'm talking to ye. And never a cry since ye was born! Why don't ye cry, thin, with your father burned to a cinder, and nothing better, Lord forgive us! than a handful of sut and ashes, and yer mother lying in her cowld coffin, ye ungrateful little devil.

A knife and a razor spells Nabuchodnez-zar."

Bayliss had not made his entrance heard. He now stepped up to Myles, and touched him on the shoulder.

"Cuolahan!"

The Irishman, startled, dropped his left leg, and brought up his right with a sudden jerk that caught the infant, fortunately, in the safest place possible, and threw it a good foot or so into the air. Myles caught it cleverly in his two great open hands.

"Bedad, now, Paul Bayliss, 'tis easy to see ye're not a married man. Stealin' on a man in that secret way, when he's got a few hours'

old babby in his arms, and his wife washin' up, and the babby might have been bruk, and kilt. Then where should we be?—where should we be, I axes you, Paul Bayliss? The beaks sitting on us—six months only, and no hard labour, for Myles Cuolahan, licensed hawker, in consideration of his excellent character—six years, and the treadmill, for Paul Bayliss, Esquire, because he's such an unlucky divil. But sit down, Paul; sit down, and have a dhrink in memory of the poor departed. Johnny's no more, Paul; the Co.'s come to an end intirely. Here's all that's left of him. Biddy won't cry over the child, for fear of bad luck."

Bayliss shook his head mournfully.

"Ye've heard, av coarse, what 'tis with poor Johnny. Why, 'tis murder, Paul, or next door to it, becase a man can't be hanged for murdherin' himself. There can't even be a funeral, becase there's nothing left to bury. They wouldn't do that, not even in poor ould Ireland—God bless her! No, sir; the base Saxon tyrants——"

"Never mind the Saxons, Myles. Tell me all about Armstrong."

"Lord rest his soul for a good, honest, dare-devil chap that never refused his glass!" Myles heaved a natural sigh.

"We tuk him home safe to his own door, you and me, and then he sets fire to the house and himself, and everything's burnt up. All the sticks and the beautiful ould pictures he was so fond of, the pictures of the ould Armstrongs; and the poor wife's dead with this little spaldeen here, nothing at all saved for him; and I'm here, wasting my time nursing of him, and that's all about it. Paul, it's lucky for Johnny that it was at Christmas-tide he died, for blessed Peter leaves the doors of heaven wide open till Twelfth Night, and no questions axed. We're six nights off that. Johnny 'll be in by this, praise the Lord! and plenty of time to spare."

A curious expression came over Bayliss's face. But just then Mrs. Cuolahan appeared at the door, and he spoke to her. An Irish girl, bright-faced and rosy-cheeked, some five and twenty years old. She looked inquiringly at her husband.

"It's Paul Bayliss, Mary, and he's come to see after his friend and partner Johnny Armstrong, dead, poor chap!"

"Friend, were you?" she replied. "Then you might have done him the good turn to keep him away from the dhrink. Partners in what, were you? was it in the whisky?"

"Hould your tongue, Biddy! With poor Johnny and his wife dead as an ould turf," said Myles; "and about as much of him left, more's the pity."

"If you're a friend," went on the woman, "you'll give Christian burial to his wife. It's hard on her, poor respectable woman, toiling and slaving for the babby that was to come; hard on her to have nothing but a pauper's funeral."

"Ay," said Paul, "it's hard. Was nothing saved from the fire?"

"Nothing," said Myles.

"Come to the cottage with me," returned Paul, in whose face the strange expression still dwelt. "Come to the cottage, and let us look at the ruins."

The two walked away to the roofless and burnt-out wreck, and Bayliss, getting inside the ruins, began poking about with his stick among the hot and smoking embers.

There were charred ends of timber, bits of

broken pottery, glass melted down and run in shapeless heaps, metal also melted, but not a scrap of anything whole. As for papers, these, of course, were all gone together.

"Nothing saved"—he spoke to himself, not to Myles—"not a scrap of paper; not a vestige of anything left."

"Sorrur a bit of paper at all, at all."

"I shall go to Esbrough, and see what is to be done," said Bayliss. "No, no, don't come with me; I can't talk now. This has been a great shock to me."

He left the Irishman standing outside the ruins, and strode off down the road.

Now, this man, who had had so many failures and disappointments, whose appearance in the Bankruptcy Court was an event regularly looked for and anticipated by his friends, was, up to this moment, one of the most honest creatures in the whole world. He had never robbed, defrauded, stolen, nor cheated. Simply a plain ne'er-do-well. Temptation assailed him, doubtless, in other forms, but never in the form of dishonesty. Lais, who lures everybody, might have lured him; Bacchus, in the shape of Johnny Arm-

strong, had certainly often beguiled him ; Mercury, the god of thieves and speculators, never. And now, as he marched along the road, with his hands in his pockets, the colour in his face came and went as an idea in his brain took form and coherency.

“If Cuolahan were to take the child . . .” He spoke the words to himself as he sat on a stile by the roadside, deep in thought. After remaining seated for several minutes, he rose with a look of resolution, wiped his forehead hurriedly with his handkerchief, and walked briskly by the field-path into Esbrough.

Across fields which had once been owned in fee by Armstrongs, ancestors of Johnny’s, but which, generations back, had passed into the hands of a thriftier race. There had remained, however, to John the Last—they were all Johns—of the broad but somewhat barren acres around Esbrough, held by the Armstrongs in the times of the Tudors and Stuarts, two farms, one close to the town, large and good ; the other, three or four miles away, small and bad. The land on this farm—Holcotes, it was called—would feed geese indifferently, and starve a few

head of inferior cattle. Oats in favourable seasons came to something, barley struggled for existence, and wheat declined to grow at all. On the property were a huge barn and three labourers' cottages, dilapidated, curious for their antiquity—one had a stone built into the front, bearing the date 1585—and adapted to the domestic requirements of pigs of homely tastes. There was no home-stead, and two or three rotting wooden structures did duty for farm buildings. An old grand-uncle of Johnny's left the two farms to him, with the stock on both and the furniture in the large substantial house on the good farm. Johnny Armstrong, one and twenty, came from Northumberland, whither his grandfather, an Esbrough Armstrong, had withdrawn to find other far-off Cousin Armstrongs, to enter into possession of his unexpected own. He brought his young and comely wife with him ; and everybody thought him a lucky fellow. This grand-uncle had "gone over to the majority" in the very nick of time. Too soon, as the result showed. For Johnny was young, inexperienced, and a jolly fellow in company.

Before six harvests had been garnered, the good farm was the property of Captain Perrymont, a local landowner. The sale was effected through the agency of Bayliss, and was his only transaction during his short career as an estate agent. After mortgages were paid off, and debts, of which there were plenty, paid, there was not very much money left for Johnny. But a few hundreds remained. Johnny removed, "till he got a farm to suit him," to the house he died in; for he never got the farm to suit him, nor, as far as anybody knew, ever looked for it. There was money in the ancient metal cash-box in the old grand-uncle's bureau to dig at, and Johnny dug. Bayliss also took his shovel there. For he liked Johnny well enough, "in company," and Johnny liked him well enough to lend him certain portions of his small stock of cash, taking "a memorandum" in return for each successive loan. And Bayliss was the tenant of the ninety-three acres some odd perches at Holcotes, and carried on a small smith's and foundry business in the barn metamorphosed into a factory. And at length Johnny, being a

gentleman with unoccupied time and capital, and Bayliss a too-persuasive friend of a versatile turn as to matters generally, the two men became partners in the business of blacksmiths, makers and menders of the neighbouring farmers' ploughs and harrows, and smiths' work in general. One sensible stipulation Johnny made. He knew something about farming ; knew warm land from cold ; and he made a proviso that the farm should be no part of the partnership. But Bayliss should carry on the Holcotes geese and cows, and barley and oats, on his own sole account. And he took "a memorandum" about all this. Between friends this was enough, and Johnny hated the prospect of "lawing." Bayliss, too, had a clear head, and wrote a good hand. Under such principals it is not surprising that business was bad, or that the two or three men employed in the blacksmith's shop followed the example of the masters pretty often, and let Punch wait for his new set of shoes, and little Hodge call a good many times for the new plough-share. So Johnny lived upon the capital that lay still, a starveling remnant, in the bureau,

instead of upon the expected profits of “ Bayliss & Co.” This fund at last was exhausted. There remained, however, Holcotes, the rental value of which was fifteen shillings an acre, which Bayliss declared was fourteen more than it was worth. Sixty-five pounds a year! But nobody about Esbrough would buy the land at any reasonable price. Johnny had tried to sell it with his other farm; and it was not to be supposed, Bayliss said, that “ far-comers ” would be found to drop down from the clouds as purchasers of this barren patch. Further, as Johnny reasoned with his wife, it would not be “ the right thing,” as Bayliss, a friend and partner, was the tenant, to sell Holcotes at all. That poor uncomplaining woman made a speech of unusual force and determination. “ John,” she said, throwing her arms round the ne’er-do-well whom she had taken, out of her great girlish love, for better or for worse—all for worse, poor girl!—“ John, I wish we had never known Mr. Bayliss.” “ Bayliss is the best friend I’ve got—I know that,” replied the fool. And wifely wisdom rejoined not.

But money must be had. It was tantalizing to be a landowner, and want the price of a

glass of refreshing whisky of an evening at the Packhorse and Talbot. It was nearly as bad as this to be told by the butcher that “his terms were quarterly”: to you, that is; but yearly to the rest of his “propertied” clients.

The genius of Paul Bayliss cut the knot. He was, as he confided to his partner, “up a damned tree” himself. He whispered in Johnny’s ear the insidious, fatal word Mortgage. Expatiated on the difficulty of getting the thing done in Esbrough; shortness of money; greedy nature of the natives; and then earned Johnny’s eternal gratitude—and a share of the sovereigns—by telling him his sister could and would lend on the title deeds of Holcotes at five per cent.

Barbara Bayliss, strict Methodist as she was, confessed to “unworldly” friends, over tea and the “thin” bread-and-butter served only at such love-feasts, that she “liked a snug mortgage.” She had not, being a lady as well as a Methodist, frequented public-house parlours, or been in any respect that rolling stone that gathers no moss. Consequently she had every penny of her moiety of the little fortune she and her brother had divided

between them, and considerable increment thereon.

To his partner's proposal Johnny, seeing a comfortable vista of legs of mutton, with "glasses," harmonious evenings and hilarity, in place of the stinted Saturday night's allowance and a meagre Sunday's dinner, cried content to Bayliss's proposal with all his heart. At the same time, he even devoted himself to serious business to the extent of forming some vague resolutions on the score of some day paying off the debt, principal and interest. As it was, the title deeds of Holcotes passed into Miss Barbara Bayliss's possession, and she handed over to her brother the sum of two hundred pounds in the form of forty dirtyish five-pound notes of the Rendale Banking Company.

Between friends a mortgage deed was looked upon as a useless piece of extravagance.

Johnny declared, in his most social way, as he signed his name with a flourish, that he "hated lawyers and lawing;" and on his way home bought his poor little wife a black silk gown to mark a red-letter day in his calendar.

Miss Barbara Bayliss was perfectly satisfied;

she had the solid and tangible security of the deeds, good old parchments, yellow and crumpled, with plenty of large seals upon them.

And for Johnny's security the amount of the loan was indorsed with the signatures of the parties on the back of the newest of the deeds, and duly witnessed by Paul Bayliss.

Months passed by, and the state of affairs warranted a further application for one hundred pounds. Over this loan the same process was gone through; and Johnny felt quite cheered by the business-like aspect of the transaction. Lastly, about twelve months before his death, there was a third loan of two hundred pounds, indorsed on the back of the deed. There was thus a debt of five hundred pounds on the Holcotes Farm, about a third of its value.

So that, at the time of his death, his income from his land was reduced to forty pounds a year by the payment of twelve pounds ten shillings of half-yearly interest to Miss Bayliss. Half a year's rent Bayliss was to have paid him on the day of his death. And this twenty pounds he now saw a prospect of keeping in his own pocket, together with many future

half-years' rent. For Johnny was a "far-comer" himself; his grand-uncle's one son had died; the Armstrongs had all left Esbrough; and if he had any relatives, they were his wife's, people in Northumberland, a long way off, who were not in the least likely to come south, and inquire into the possessions of a man who had destroyed his movables by his own act, and who, as all the world about Esbrough believed, had mortgaged his few acres of wretched land for more than they were worth.

And Myles Cuolahan was offering to take the heir. Where? Anywhere, out of the way. On the tramp. In the pack of a hawker, who might never come back. Part of the "swag" he trotted from fair to fair, or from door to door. Babies often died, too; and if his father had lived, he never would have had a halfpenny. And everybody who knew anything—Bayliss reasoned—knew that he had over-persuaded his sister to advance money by way of mortgage on such bad property; and nobody knew the amount, for Barbara was close. And as mortgagee she had a right to foreclose, and nobody would bid against him

if he bought in with her money. And a great many other things, more or less knavish, and therefore instigated by the devil; every one of them aimed at defrauding this little son of Vulcan of his interest in forty bits of yellow metal year by year.

The power of gold to tear up the roots of that old tree honesty, and leave no shoot nor sucker to show the spot where it stood, has been too often a theme for novelists and other moral philosophers, for it to be necessary that I should explain how it came about that the mind of Paul Bayliss, brooding over his bankrupt smithy; his hard year with the cattle and poultry; the cow that died of foot and mouth disease, and the rascally butcher who thought her carcass “too far gone for sendin’ to London”; the cart-horse that was struck by lightning a couple of years ago, and that he had never been able to replace; chickens with pip; goslings trampled out of life by the pigs; the failure of the barley crop; all the evils that could befall a foot-ball of fortune in the agricultural line—decided to let matters slide at all events; and as one thing leads to another, he presently determined

to give them a kick on the way he wanted them to slide.

"We shall see, Barbara," he said to his sister, "what the estate will fetch towards your mortgage when we sell it up. Meantime you've got your interest safe."

Barbara Bayliss, content with her twenty-five pounds a year, asked no questions about the farm.

Her brother resolved also, now that Johnny was dead, to say good-bye to Packhorse and Talbot habits; for Paul Bayliss was no reckless profligate. He knew that the day comes to all alike, when atonement by hard labour or by suffering must come for ill-gotten pleasures and young follies. So he began well by expressing himself with much propriety of language about the calamity; grieved over Johnny's career and its untimely ending; put it about that there would not be a shilling left when the mortgage was cleared off, if the estate, indeed, would ever pay it; and after the inquest, behaved handsomely in the matter of the funeral, heading the subscription list got up very readily among Johnny's friends.

After the dead, the living.

The inquest over, he sought Myles Cuolahan, and asked him what he proposed to do about the child.

"Let Biddy keep him," said the hawker. "She's grown to the boy, and you wouldn't break her heart by taking him away."

"It seems a good arrangement," replied Bayliss. "To be sure, Armstrong has no relations here; and everybody knows the child is with her . . . and . . . and . . . But, Cuolahan, you are not likely to stay in this town?"

"No, we have been in Esbrough too long; my legs ache to be out in the open; so do Biddy's. We shall go on the tramp again. But niver you fear; the boy will be well looked after, and it's a healthy life."

Bayliss did not fear for the boy; he only feared for the voice of popular opinion. As it happened, popular opinion was silent on the subject. It was known that Johnny Armstrong's infant was put out to nurse, and thus the child was forgotten.

"A healthy life," he murmured. "Yes"—with a secret shudder at the impious hope lying in his mind that perhaps the boy might

die. "You will let me know from time to time that he is flourishing?"

"I will," said Myles.

"And if he wants help at any time, if I can give it, I will give it," he went on, trying to compound with present wickedness by imaginary and future benevolence. "Myles Cuolahan, it's good of you to take the boy. It reminds me of my own conduct at the funeral." He alluded, in these delicate terms, to his subscription. "The town will speak well of both of us." Myles grinned. He cared little for the opinion of the town, and thought little of Paul Bayliss's generosity. Then Paul, with a wry face, lugged out—the term is the only one possible for the leathern instrument then in use—his long purse, and fished up two sovereigns. They were a part of the twenty pounds due to his late partner.

"That is for the child, Myles. God knows I'm poor enough, and how to get through this year I do not know. But there it is. They shall never say that I deserted my poor partner's child after his death."

"Poor Johnny Armstrong!" said Myles. "Biddy shall have this money."

"Ay, poor Johnny!" said the other.

A week after this, Myles gave the signal for departure.

He carried the "swag" on his back—a box full of needles, pins, and cotton twist. Biddy carried the baby.

There was a rising ground a mile out of the town, where Myles called a halt.

"Turn him round, Biddy," he said. "Let him look at the place where his mother died. Look ye, poor little creetur. There's where all the Armstrongs lie buried. Ye come of as good a stock as meself, Myles Cuolahan—nearly. And it'll be about as much good for you. Look at the ould place, for Lord knows when ye'll see it again. Say God bless you, Biddy alaunah!"

As he turned on his way, a tear rolled down the cheek of the Irishman; but, as he was walking in front of his wife, after the manner of the patriarch Jacob, Mohammed the Prophet, and the modern race of tramps, Biddy did not see it. But she heard him sigh under his breath, and she clutched the baby the tighter out of sympathy—"Poor Johnny Armstrong!"

## CHAPTER I.

IT is nine years later. The memory of poor Johnny Armstrong and his tragical end has well-nigh become a tradition. The lusty revellers whose voices joined in his choruses have gone the way that all lusty revellers go as the fatal fortieth year draws nigh ; that is, they have either settled down into quiet folk who keep their eyes well open to the main chance, have married wives, and go to church regularly, or they have gone under altogether, and are no more seen. Some among them lie in the churchyard, their merriment stilled for ever. Some, ruined and beggared, have crept sadly up to London—the common refuge—where they perform the lowest duties in a city clerk's office, or prowl mournfully, with sad and wistful eyes, about the streets. Go ask, among those who have become respect-

able, what has become of their former friends. Charley is married and settled—that is good for Charley. Jack? When last you heard about Jack he was selling medicines on commission—that is bad for Jack. Tom is a billiard marker. Harry is at Portland, for his country's good. The fast set of a country town is like the fast set at a West-End club: those only emerge safely who are wise enough to come out in good time; and the plungers in gin-and-water, pipes, and harmonious evenings, meet with much the same fate as the plungers in baccarat, badminton, loo, and opera-dancers. Which is, of course, just what it should be; for there ought not to be one fate for the rich and well-born, and another for those who never had a grandfather, and to whom the Funds are the shadow of a name.

Paul Bayliss is at Holcotes, going on quietly, but more prosperously. Barbara, his sister, is buried, and he has inherited her little fortune. He is comfortably putting a small sum of money away every year out of the proceeds of the horse-shoes, pigs, poultry, and crops, at which he was disposed to swear when we first met him. There is a house on

the Holcotes land now. Bayliss lives there; but he pays no rent. In uneasy moments a thought flashes across him that the time may come when he will have to pay up in full. To meet this evil, he puts the rent religiously into the bank every half-year, for he defrauds no one. Where is John Armstrong's heir? No one knows, and it is not his duty to run after him. Nor is it his duty to tell all the world to whom Holcotes belongs. There is no one living, since Barbara breathed her last, to ask him questions; no one who dares challenge his right to the land where, for nine long years, he has rested undisturbed. Discovery? What is there to discover? The rent is lying in the bank, ready for the owner to claim *when the owner is able to claim it*. But where is the owner? Nine years ago there was a baby: he is doubtless dead. Carried about the roads by a drunken Irish hawker and his wife; badly fed, perhaps; neglected, most probably. Why, the children of the poor, as Bayliss has read, die at the rate of fifty per cent. before they are five years old. Things have thriven with him, too, which all country people take for a clear sign

that Providence is on his side. He has given up his bad habits, is temperate, works hard, is a churchwarden ; and though his farm is small, he turns it to the best advantage, and stands well among his neighbours ; insomuch that, when he marries, everybody says that his wife is a lucky woman ; and the girls envy Mrs. Bayliss, who has a husband so prosperous, so cheery, and so good-natured. To be sure, the baby may be living. Well, and if he is, let him turn up and claim his own. Then Paul Bayliss pictures himself, after disputing the identity of the boy as long as possible, enacting the part of the virtuous guardian. "Young man," he will say, "the farm is yours ; but I am your tenant. There is your rent, safely and regularly paid into the bank year after year, to a separate account in my own name, but never touched. Take it, and let your father's oldest friend still remain your friend and tenant." True it is, that there are moments when another drama is acted unwillingly before his eyes, when he perforce sees himself in quite another character, when he welcomes young Armstrong as an intruder, denies his right even to the

name he bears, and says nothing about the ownership of the farm. Strangely enough, these thoughts generally crowd across his brain at church-time, during the morning sermon; and at such an hour he envies his neighbours, the fat, jolly farmers, who can sit with their heads back and their eyes upturned in a sublime rapture of indifference, while the clergyman harangues sinners—that is, the farm labourers—on their sins, and exhorts the profligates, the worldly-minded, the proud, the uplifted, the licentious, the thoughtless, and the sensual—always the farm labourers—to turn from their evil ways.

The baby living? Could such a baby die? Come with me to Long Lane, to one of the most wretched streets in the most wretched part of Sheffield, and see for yourself.

In a poor and dirty room, whose wainscoted walls were, perhaps, once white; whose ceiling could never, surely, have been white; whose furniture consists of a bed—a straw mattress spread in a corner—a table, and one chair, are two children, sitting side by side and hand in hand upon the mattress. It is seven o'clock and a bright May evening; the

democratic sun, who is not particular, and warms everything with a fine impartiality, shines through the dirty panes of glass upon the pair. One is a boy—look at him—the image, the perfect resemblance of poor Johnny Armstrong, with the same dark-brown curly hair ; the same bright eyes, fearless and keen —hazel eyes, deep and true ; the same broad forehead, and—but here the likeness ceases. For his lips are firm and strong, while his unlucky father's were weak and shifty ; his chin is full and square, while Johnny's was small and retreating ; and in these two signs of a merciful fortune those who knew his mother might have traced a resemblance to her. For this is no other than Jack Armstrong himself, the little son of Vulcan, born in a foundry while the seething metal ran up and down the moulds, and the furnace flashed its red light upon his opening eyes, carried up and down the roads of England for the fresh breezes of heaven to strengthen his frame, and the pure country food—the milk and bread ungrudgingly bought for him by poor Biddy Cuolahan—to make him wax strong and lusty. A big boy, mark you, for his

years ; brave and determined : about him none of the London street boy's craft and impudence, for he knows them not. Myles Cuolahan, like all the rest, has been to London, but the boy has not run wild with others : he has had grave duties to perform ; and when they are in a town, as now, while Myles goes out with his pins, needles, and twist to earn the daily bread, little Jack must stop at home and look after Norah, or must lead her up and down into the fields to play, pick the daisies where he can, and breathe such fresh air as may be found within hail of the Sheffield streets. Norah is poor Biddy's parting bequest to Jack. When, four years ago, she lay down and died, stricken with some mortal disease of over-fatigue and trouble, she made Jack take a great oath.

"Swear to me, now," she said ; "swear, Jack, asthore—you that I carried in my arms and nursed at my own breast, Jack, my own son, almost—swear now, so help you Mary and the blessed saints, that you'll always look to the girl. I'm going, Jack, but I'll die aisy if you'll promise for little Norah."

Jack was eight at the time, and Norah

three, but the boy was perfectly acquainted with the nature and responsibilities of the trust, though he had not, as yet, even a nodding acquaintance with the blessed saints. But he repeated after her, crying the while, " So help me Mary and the blessed saints, Biddy, I'll never leave little Norah ! Why would I ? "

Indeed, he held the child in his little arms as he spoke, and her cheek was nestled against his.

" 'Tis no use spakin' to Myles ; no use at all, at all. Oh ! Jack, and he so good when the dhrink isn't upon him. And promise me something for yourself, Jack, darlin', and then I'll die happy as well as aisy ; because I know then that you'll be always good to my little Norah. Promise me that you'll never, never dhrink."

Jack promised readily enough, having, at that early age, little experience of the temptations of whisky, beer, or rum, and, as yet, no discrimination of vintages.

" I'll never drink, Biddy. And, see, perhaps some day Myles 'll leave it off."

" Lave it off ! " she repeated with a bitter sneer. " Lave it off, is it ? He'll never lave

it off so long as he's got a copper to spend at the house. Lave it off? Did ye iver know man or woman that left it off when once they'd begun? Lave it off? 'Tis meat and clothing: 'tis hope: 'tis love: 'tis their wives, God help us: 'tis their children: 'tis their salvation: 'tis their praste: 'tis their mass, I tell ye. Lave it off? Myles is dhrinkin' now, when his Biddy lies a-dyin'. Oh dear! oh dear!"

She stopped, growing weaker every moment, and wept silent tears of resignation and sorrow. Presently the last tear rolled down her thin and sunburnt cheek, and her features lay in the trustful smile of death.

The Lacedæmonians, in their laudable anxiety to hold up to their much-suffering youth the dangers of wine in their proper light, were energetic, but elementary. They got certain Helots, who were, no doubt, delighted at getting the office, and made them gloriously drunk at stated times; then the Spartan youth admired the wondrous magic of wine, in that it turns an intelligent creature, usually firm on his legs and sharp with his tongue, into a shambling, in-kneed, slobbering animal, incapable of walking, confused of

speech, and muddy of intellect. The lesson was, perhaps, well enough in a country where there was no whisky, and where they actually mixed their finest wine with turpentine, so as to make it more nauseous than the black broth, and a less-to-be-desired drink than the sparkling Eurotas, but it would not do in an advanced civilization. Could we contrive such a lesson, it might be managed, with a little more cruelty, by first inspiring one Helot—for one would be enough—with a steady unconquerable love of whisky, and by then inviting the attention of the callow brood to the sufferings of his wife and children. For they would see how, while the disease grew stronger and stronger, the wife would go about, her face set fair to meet the world, but with a heart ever more bitter and miserable; how the children would grow shabbier in spite of her constant efforts; how the table would become daily more meagre; how the furniture would disappear bit by bit; and how, lastly, there would be nothing left to stave off starvation for another day.

Little Jack knew nothing of his father's sins: but all these things he had seen and

noticed, in his brief life of nine years, in his benefactor, Myles Cuolahan, as he went faster and faster down that fatal path whose flowers seem at first so bright, whose briars, so strong and cruel, as you hurry down the slope, rend your garments as well as your hearts.

Biddy died. Myles caine home too far gone to know it.

Next day, with the passionate self-reproof that his better nature taught him, he wept and prayed over his wife's cold body, and after the funeral, kept sober for a fortnight.

Then it began all over again.

The children had been out in the afternoon, Jack leading Norah. Then they came home and waited for Myles. For breakfast they had bread-and-milk; for dinner they had bread without the milk; for tea, because the bread was all gone, and Myles not come home, they had nothing.

Jack told all his stories, one after the other; then he danced to the child; then he tossed her in his strong arms; then he sat down beside her, and caressed her. The fretful hunger was too strong at last to bear, and she burst into a low wail of pain.

"Hush, Norah, darlin', hush! Father'll come presently."

"Jack, I am so hungry."

"Not yet," said the sage of nine. "You know you must never be hungry till father comes home. Norah shall have her tea directly."

Not, you see, that the children kept fashionable hours, and had tea late, in this rookery; only Myles had left no money, and they had to wait.

A thought struck the boy. He put Norah off his knees, and searched in the cupboard. There was a single crust of bread—dry, it is true, but still a piece of bread—lying in the corner of the cupboard unnoticed. This he put into a cup and poured a little water over it so as to soften it, and then he fed the child, who gnawed it as ravenously as a dog gnaws a bone.

"There, Norah," he whispered, "we shall have more presently, when father comes home. I didn't know it was there. Eat it all up, Norah."

She devoured it by degrees, taking her time over the simple meal, while poor Jack

looked at her with ravenous eyes and envied. Presently, she laid her head upon his shoulder and went fast asleep. Jack took the blanket from the bed, laid it over her, with his arm for pillow, took off her shoes and socks, and lay down beside her. She was quieted ; that, at least, was something : but where was Myles ? For the first time in his life, little Jack felt the horrible stings of suspicion : he thought that Myles had deserted them both. He was too hungry to sleep, and lay silently beside the little girl, staring at the red light of sunset in the little bit of sky above him.

He began to think of going downstairs to beg a piece of bread, but he was too proud for that, yet. So the sunset faded and the darkness came on, and there was no Myles, and Jack lay broad awake while the church clock struck nine, and ten, and eleven.

Then the pain grew so great as to be intolerable, and he was fain to moan for hunger in his childish misery.

Twelve o'clock struck, and the street grew quieter ; and one o'clock, and the street was almost hushed, but no Myles came, and the

boy's heart sank lower and lower. Then Norah awoke and called him. He crept back to the mattress, and so fell asleep with the girl in his arms. The moon shone in and lit up the room: presently the light, shifting round, fell full upon the sleeping figures, the sweet round faces of childhood, the little limbs tossed carelessly, and the curly locks lying together; and with it all, a sense of the girl's confidence in her protector, the boy's courage for the helpless child, shown in the attitude of their hands. In such a light, on such a scene, we might fancy the room tenanted by the guardian angels of the children. Are there, or is it fancy, the bending figures of two women praying hand in hand above the bed? Are those white streaks upon the wall only the ignoble stains of poverty and neglect, or are they the white robes of the two dead mothers, jealous for their children?

## CHAPTER II.

MYLES CUOLAHAN, oblivious of the children, was at his club, a select circle of Irish gentlemen who used to meet nightly, or on such nights as were convenient, for the club was one of Perpetual Adoration of Bacchus, at that famous tavern the Fox and Hounds. This was a night of more than common interest, for it was Monday, and there were gathered together, quite by accident, a collection of celebrities of whom Ireland had indeed reason to be proud. There was Paddy Flinn, hero of a hundred fights, whose life and exploits are recorded in the chronicles of the P.R.; Anthony Noon, than whom none better wielded a bunch of fives; and Alick Reed, a heavy-weight who feared not even to withstand the godlike twins, first patrons of the Art of Boxing. There was O'Carrol, who

could prove lineal descent from the Irish kings of the same name, and now deemed it no dishonour to advance civilization as a hodman. There was Tape the “translator,” of whom it is related that, being once entrusted with a pair of boots to translate,—that is, to fit with new soles! and heels—he disposed of the raw material for what it would fetch as leather in the rough, and drank the proceeds, afterwards humorously translating the boots by means of the binding of an old leather-bound volume which happened to be lying handy. He was the same man who, one Sunday morning, was left in charge of as noble a piece of beef as was ever dropped into a pot to boil, while his mates went out to drink. The temptation of thirst came upon him: I grieve to say that Mr. Tape yielded to the whisperings of the devil, took out the beef, replacing it by a lapstone, and sold it for what it would fetch in old ale. When the two mates came back in time to boil the cabbage they naturally took the joke in ill part, and the honest translator kept out of their way till at least one more Sunday had passed. A fellow of an infinite wit was Tape, and a clubable man,

able to sing and dance as well as drink. Then there was Anthony Noon again, above mentioned, who had retired from the ring, and now found his means of subsistence in an occupation which began about the 1st of September and ended somewhere about February. For he was accustomed to purchase, at low rates, the leanest, skinniest birds that came up to market, and could thus act by them in the same unprincipled manner as the American, perhaps an imitator of Mr. Noon, adopted for the jumping frog : he filled them with small shot and sold them by weight. It was a lucrative business, but it left his summers a mere blank, and during a good six months in the year honest Anthony lived chiefly in seclusion. Patsy M'Nulty was there, as good-natured a bruiser as ever stripped ; he had just lost his fight with Nailer, owing to a too-confident belief in Myles Cuolahan's training powers. And there, too, was Denys O'Toole, grown old now, and grey-headed, but respected still, by reason of the handsome thrashing he had once given the Prince of Wales, when that potentate, accompanied by two friends, neither of them members of the Temperance League,

or even of the Christian Young Men's Association, ventured one night into the Rookery at Westminster, and assisted at an Irish wake. And it was reckoned part of the general meanness of the English character that when the Prince came to the throne he did not seek out Denys and reward him with a pension for life. Yet Denys was the only man in all his life who ever showed the Prince what a thing it is to have your head in Chancery.

The room was a long low room at the back of the tavern; on the table at the end sat a fiddler, at his feet a hat into which every newcomer dropped a sixpence, a collection for Brien M'Taverty, now in trouble, and about to be tried the next day on a trumped-up charge of assaulting the police while intoxicated. Every man had his pipe in his mouth, and some of the ladies too—this was a club in which ladies' society, so far from being avoided, was even courted—and everybody, man or woman, had his mug of drink handy to his fingers. Among them was Myles Cuolahan, the little spare man with the big hands, singing, drinking, and roaring with the best. If you look in his face you will notice a queer

expression, one of anxiety, a sort of fear upon it. His cheeks are puffed, his nose is red, he looks twenty years older than when we met him last. Poor Myles has been going down-hill fast since his wife died, and is now very near the end of his tether, though there is still time to turn back.

There is dancing ; there is singing ; there is the music, not low and rippling, but loud and harsh, of women's voices ; there is fiddling ; there is stamping on the floor ; and presently there are indications of a coming duel.

“Fight it out, lads !” cries Myles, springing to the floor. “More's the fun. Pity 'twould be if the dhrink don't make an alteration. We come in sad, and we go out happy ; we come in peaceful, and we go out quarrelsome : Glory be to whisky !”

Whether the club danced, or sang, or drank, or fought, the fiddle went on exactly the same, playing Irish jigs. The fiddler sat with his nose in the air and his eyes on the ceiling, as if absorbed in thought. Now and then he moved his right foot in time, but besides this he gave no sign of life beyond the movement of his arms and fingers.

The row began, if one may trace things back to their ultimate cause, like all rows since the Siege of Troy, through a woman. There was a neat and extremely pretty little Welshwoman, remarkable among the other ladies present for the careful purity of her attire. She had black hair, very bright eyes, and a very striking expression in her face which, when she was watching a fight, made you understand how the Roman ladies managed to enjoy a gladiatorial contest. She was the lawful wife and better-half of Patsy M'Nulty. She spoke with a pure and beautiful accent in "book" English, perfectly different from that of the rough Irish round her, and as if, which was in fact the case, she was speaking a foreign language. And though she sometimes used the "argot" of her associates, she preferred the tongue of Addison, which she had been taught at school.

"My husband," she remarked to Mr. Nailer, already mentioned above, who showed signs of grogginess about the head, "would scorn to be intoxicated by six little glasses of whisky. My husband is a ferry much petter man than you or Myles Cuolahan either, though you did beat

him and win the money at the match. But everybody knows that was because Myles trained him, and they both got drunk together every day. He would be perfectly prepared to fight you again to-morrow. Do not think my husband is afraid of you."

After firing this blow in a calm and collected manner she retired to the other end of the room, nearest the door, where she sat and smilingly watched the effect. Mr. Nailer, whose sensibilities were as keen as his proportions were large, was stung to the quick by this observation, and, instantly leaping to his feet, began a circuit round the room, pushing his way through the dancers with the carelessness of superior strength. Encumbered as he was with many glasses of whisky, which made his head roll about and his legs lurch, his progress was unsteady.

"Where's M'Nulty?" he shouted. "Show me M'Nulty. Bring out your Patsy M'Nulty; him as I thrashed already, and him as I'm ready to thrash again for five pounds or a hundred. Come out. Myles Cuolahan—Myles the trainer—Ho! ho!—Myles with the big fist, come out both of ye, till I kill ye at wunst."

Patsy and Myles, who were side by side, rushed to the front, and in a moment the bridge of battle was Homericly set with combatants, in which all, save the modest little Welshwoman, who only looked on and smiled, took an active and a pleasurable part.

After it had raged for ten minutes or so, the landlord, thinking that enough blood was shed for the preservation of honour, turned out the lights, and when quiet was restored, threatened to turn out the combatants as well, unless they consented to take their drink "quiet and sober, like Christians." They shook hands and sat down again. The lights were lit once more, the fiddler, who had been stopped, struck up another jig, and all was harmony again.

"You're getting dhrunk, Myles," said Patsy as a friendly observation. "Ye were dhrunk last night; and ye were dhrunk the night afore last night. How long have ye been in it, now?"

"Six weeks to-night, Patsy. I've been dhrunk for six weeks every night; and spent all the money. Lord help the childher!"

"Then don't do it again," rejoined the brawler. "Go home now, Myles, and go to bed."

"I had 'em last night, Pat. I had the horrors worse than iver they come before. I got out of bed and I tuk the razor—think o' that, now—and I stood over the childher on their matthrass and . . . and . . . I don't know how it was I got safe to bed again, and they woke up safe this morning. I'm afraid to go home, Pat, I'm afraid."

He finished his glass of whisky, which was not adulterated and spoiled with water, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Then he looked furtively round the room, and behind him, as if there might be some fearful thing prowling in the rear, and tried to laugh.

But the little Welshwoman with the demure countenance, seeing no further prospect of any fighting, came and carried away his friend.

"Patsy, you are coming home with me. You have to begin training to-morrow, and your fight is to take place in a fortnight. It is only for a ten-pound note, but you must win it. You have had two more glasses of whisky than by a right you should have taken. Come home at once."

Patsy was like a lamb, and followed his

commanding officer. He was not a bit the worse for the little skirmish he had just gone through; a cut lip heals very soon, and a black eye is one of those things that few gentlemen of his habits of thought and occupation are long without.

Myles, left alone, began to drink harder. In course of time he found himself pleasantly and hopelessly drunk, and rejoiced, for he could now bid defiance—a drunken man's defiance—to the dreams that haunted him night after night, when the fumes of the whisky left his brain. It was past one in the morning when he stumbled up the stairs, threw himself upon the bed, dressed as he was, and in a moment was fast asleep.

It might have been an hour later—not more, because there was yet no light in the sky, and the moon shone bright and clear through the window—that he stirred on the bed, put out an arm as if to feel for something, and then, with a start and a groan, sat up and looked wildly round him. There was nothing in the room, not even furniture; there was nobody save the sleeping children in the corner; but he glared round and round the room as if

following some Shape or spectral image of his brain. Presently his eyes dilated and became fixed. The creature of his drunken fancy resolved itself into something resembling a form ; took to itself arms and legs ; assumed eyes that looked into Myles's face, and fingers that beckoned him on ; put on a face which was one of unimaginable cunning, devilry, and mockery ; and, stooping close to his bedside, moved cadaverous lips through which no sound came, but which spoke words easy to be understood. "Come, Myles, now is the time to do it."

Yet there was nobody in the room at all, except himself and the two children ; these were sleeping on their mattress in the corner ; the moon lay full upon them, showing little Norah with her head nestled on Jack's shoulders, her arms about his neck, her long dark hair lying in masses over Jack's head and face ; and the boy, weary with hunger and watching, lying on his back and sleeping off the pain. The eyes of the drunkard, fixed upon the Person who walked slowly from the bedside, passed over the space from the bed to the cupboard, from the cupboard, still

more slowly, to the mattress where the children lay asleep.

Then Myles groaned aloud, and, slipping from the bedside, stood upright, steady as a rock, though he had been almost helplessly drunk but an hour before, and sighed heavily.

Then he sat down again on the bed, deliberately took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, unlaced and took off his boots, which were the heavy double-soled boots worn by trampers and bought by those gentlemen of Lancashire who correct their wives with booted feet. Then, in his stockings, he crept silently to the cupboard.

What is it his hands feel for in the dark as he tries each shelf, one after the other, in vain? He forgets, perhaps, how only that very morning he took his razor to a neighbour, under the pretence of wanting an edge put on it, and left it with him for safety. Unable to find it, he turns round, still following his invisible director. Then his eye brightens, and he creeps across the room to the fireplace. The poker lies there. As he steps a plank creaks beneath his feet, and little Jack wakes up.

With a start, like Myles, and with a dreadful fear upon him, for he sees Myles out of bed, dressed, and stealthily creeping towards the mattress, with the poker in his hand. He is moving so slowly, so slowly, that at first you would think him standing in the middle of the room. But he does move, for all that, and it is always in the direction of the bed ; while in his hand he carries, lifted in readiness to strike, the poker, which flashes as he gets within the moonlight from the window. Jack, like some poor Indian bird in presence of the snake, sat spell-bound, motionless, his eyes fixed on the white face and menacing features of Myles.

The room was light enough, in the twilight of the summer and the bright morn of May, for him to see something more—something that he had never yet seen in his drunken benefactor—a purpose. His mouth was drawn back, his dry lips trembled with impatience, his white teeth gleamed, his eyeballs starting from his head, his body was bent double, as he stole, slowly, slowly, over the boards with the weapon in his hand. And then Jack saw, further, that, though Myles was looking him

straight in the face, he did not see him—he was looking at some one else. For between Myles and the children stood the devilish spectre of his brain ready to make poor Myles a murderer ! But as yet he had not given the signal.

Jack never knew how long this lasted—probably but half a minute—for his nerves were frozen with terror. Then little Norah moved in her sleep, and whispered in her dreams ; and Jack, recovering from his stupefaction, sprang out of the bed and stood face to face with Myles. Stripling and child as he was, the boy was ready to do battle with the drunkard for the life of Norah. On the bare arms of the man the muscles stood out like the ropes of the rigging of a yacht ; in his face there was set a look of dreadful resolution ; his eyes gleamed with the purpose of destruction : he was possessed with a devil. To meet all this force there was nothing but a child of nine, weak with long hunger, too, if that made any difference, and only strong of will. On his forehead fell the hot and poisonous breath of the drunken man, like that gas which, descending upon the earth,

poisons and chokes the life out of man and plant. Almost within reach of the heavy iron weapon, the child stood gazing into the face of the haunted man; who dragged forward his feet, inch by inch, as if drawn by something beyond his will. And the boy saw, while he shivered and trembled to see it, that Myles had no perception at all of his presence: their faces were not a foot apart, for Myles was stooping; their eyes looked into and were reflected in each other: but Myles saw nothing. And Jack would have screamed and cried for help, but he was afraid; for he did not know what to do, or what would happen.

The man made a hasty step forward—one more, and he would be upon the boy. Jack stepped aside and seized him by the right arm, turning him suddenly and violently away from the mattress where little Norah lay sleeping, with her white bare limbs tossed carelessly and gleaming in the moonlight. To Jack's astonishment, Myles made no sign, but continued slowly advancing in the new direction. This was that of his own bed, which lay but a yard off. Jack—always with one eye upon

the villainous poker—pulled him gently by the shirt-sleeve till he nearly touched the bed, and then fell back and watched. As his knee struck the iron edge of the bed, Myles gave a fierce but muffled cry, and raised the poker to strike. Once—twice—thrice ; and then he redoubled the blows upon the unoffending pillow, while the great drops rolled off his forehead and his chest heaved at the exercise. Then, suddenly, dropping the poker, he fell down upon his knees by the bedside, and burst into violent prayers and sobs.

When he was fairly spent and the danger was over, the day was breaking. Jack quietly took the poker and hid it beneath his own mattress. Little Norah still slept, undisturbed. Then, mindful of poor Biddy's last injunction, he fell upon his knees and thanked God as one who has escaped a great and terrible peril. And then he turned to watch Myles. His face buried in his hands—his whole frame shaken and trembling with emotion, he was crying, praying, and cursing, all in the same breath.

“ Oh, Lord ! ” he groaned, “ forgive me ! I have killed them both ! My little Norah

—Norah, alaunah, my darlint ! my love ! my little baby—my black-haired Norah, ma-vourneen ! will ye niver spake to me again ?—niver kiss your wicked father's cheeks ?—niver twine your little arms round his neck ? Niver again—niver again ! May the Lord curse the dhrink ! Oh, Jack ! now it's your blood my arms are dabblin' in—your innocent blood, my purty boy that I love as well as Norah, and better. Oh, Lord ! Lord ! . . . forgive me ! forgive me ! ”

\* \* \* \* \*

“ What's the use, Myles, of askin' to be forgiven ? Why don't you get up, Myles Cuolahan, ye blackhearted murdherin' Prodes-dan—why don't ye get up, and run away ? They'll find ye, and they'll hang ye, and sarve ye right ! ”

\* \* \* \* \*

“ I can't get up. I'm tied to the bed. 'Tis the Lord that houlds me tight and won't let me go. Lord ! Lord ! let me go and be hanged, but show me once more—oh ! show me once more the childher, if only to mock me, before I die. And I'll take the poker and beat out my own brains, and thin we shall all

three come to You at wunst. Norah and Jack will go to heaven, where Biddy sits playin' on a goulden harrup and waitin' for us ; but I shall niver go there, and they'll be all there miserable for iver and for iver, cryin' out their blessed eyes when they ought to be singin' and makin' glory. Oh, Jack ! oh, Biddy ! 'tis Myles has spoiled your heaven for ye. For the Lord can niver forgive this night—He can't do it. I musn't ax it. It wouldn't be fair on Patsy M'Nulty, who niver killed anybody, except by accident and in his divarshin. Lord ! I dussn't ax it—I don't——" Then he began again almost in the same words.

When he prayed again to see the "childher" once more, Jack, who had no terror now that he had once successfully diverted him from the mattress, put his hand under his forehead and lifted it up, lying down so that his face met Myles's. Myles showed no surprise. He thought it was an answer to his prayer, and only kissed the boy silently and solemnly, his tears falling upon his face. Then he murmured, "Now Norah, oh, Lord ! Glory be to all the saints."

Jack brought Norah, still asleep, and laid her in front of him. When the man saw the child he burst into a fit of fresh sobs and lamentations, waking her up.

Little Norah began to prattle, but Jack took her up again, and laid her on the mattress.

"Norah must go to sleep again directly."

"Iss," said Norah, lying down and shutting her eyes very obediently. Directly Jack left her, however, she sat up and began to crow and toss her arms about. Myles got up from his knees, wringing his hands, and began debating aloud whether he should run away or not. Before he had settled that important point, the fit of repentance and despair seemed to leave him as suddenly as it came, and he lay down on the bed with his eyes shut, and fell fast asleep. Jack proceeded leisurely to undress him. This partially accomplished, he bethought him of the next day, and proceeded to examine his pockets. In the coat-tail there was a small loaf. In the pockets there was a penny. Not another farthing had the man, though his receipts the day before had amounted to some eight or nine shillings. Poor Jack had eaten

nothing for nearly twenty hours, and he could wait no longer. Dividing the loaf into two parts, he took one for himself and the other he kept for Norah, giving her a little piece at a time. His own was soon gone, and he was hungry still. But he would not touch the child's portion, and sat down again on the bed, wearied with watching and waiting; and presently the two children were sound asleep again in each other's arms; and when the morning roused them up all was but a dream of the night.

## CHAPTER III.

It was not till one o'clock in the day that Myles Cuolahan awoke, first with the feeling of lazy contentment which always follows violent exertion and long sleep; then with a sense of discomfort, due to the whisky; and then with a sudden, agonizing pang at the heart, when he remembered his dreadful deed of the night, a pang which made him leap from the bed and stare wildly round, crying, "Jack!—Norah!—the childher."

He remembered it all: the devil who came to his bedside and whispered; who went to the cupboard and pointed to where the razor generally lay; who led him to the poker, and put it into his hand; who bid him creep softly, so as not to wake the little ones; who nerved his arm to strike, and then, when the deed was done, left him despairing. What he could not

remember, trying to recall the time when he crept slowly round the room, with his arm half-raised, and his head bent forward, was the *reason*: why had the devil told him to kill the children? Yet he knew there was a reason, and a good one, because it seemed the only thing left to do, the one possible thing, before the whole was finished.

He was standing with his back to the children's mattress, and suddenly it flashed across him that behind him, silent, battered, bathed with blood, were the murdered children. Then a worse horror fell upon his heart, and it became colder than stone. The beads of such a sweat as stood upon Macbeth's brow in the morning, stood upon his brow; his limbs shook beneath him; he turned up his face, and met the sun's great eye staring in upon him like an accuser; and then, not daring to turn round, he stepped to the window, threw it open, and leaned his head out, looking into the crowded street below. When the mind is laden with some great and terrible burden of anxiety or guilt, it takes an interest, by way of refuge, in any little trifle that meets it. Oliver Cromwell, when he signs the death-

warrant of Charles, flirts the ink in his neighbour's face. "Brutal flippancy!" cry the foolish critics, not discerning here a proof of the man's terrible mental struggles. If you read the ghastly stories of great crimes, you will find everywhere, and in grim contrast against the terrible reality, the importance of the trifles. As when Beatrice Cenci is led to execution, her last words were not of terror, of repentance, of blind wrath against the cruelty of fate, but about the arrangement of her hair :—

"Here, mother, tie  
My girdle for me, and bind up this hair  
In any simple knot : ay, that does well.  
And yours, I see, is coming down."

So poor Myles Cuolahan, the murderer, leaned out of his window and watched the passers-by. There was a Punch and Judy, the drama just finishing with Toby the dog, the beadle, and —the gallows. He laughed at the beadle, but when it came to the gallows he felt a sort of uneasiness, just as if something had been said or done which jarred upon him. Then there was a lusty quarrel between two ladies just beneath him, touching a disputed debt of two-

pence. Before the policeman sauntered round the corner there was a little fight, in which mischief was done to the extent of many two-pences, and both went off in custody together—in chains, so to speak, but preserving still grandeur of spirit and freedom of tongue. The sight of the man in blue gave Myles another feeling of distrust which annoyed him; but that, too, passed away. And then he watched the children who swarmed in the crowded street, or marked their sports, which were many; for some danced on the pavement to the tune of a barrel-organ—girls these, who would, if they were lucky, eventually become ladies of the *corps de ballet*: some sailed bits of wood, purloined from the shop, down the flowing gutter: some hung about the stalls, and tried to steal the fruit: some addressed themselves gravely to the task of nursing their younger brothers and sisters. It was a warm afternoon, and all were out.

Myles began to get hungry, and once, under the first impulse, drew in his head and half turned round; then, with a hollow groan, leaned out again, and, for a few minutes, knew and saw nothing but his misery. He

did not hear a step on the stairs and a knock at his door, which, no notice having been taken at first, was repeated, and then, there being still silence, the door was opened, and a lady came in.

She looked round the room, bare and desolate of everything except the bed and the mattress; and saw the man standing at the window. She called him. As he made no answer, she crossed the room and pulled him by the sleeve.

“Myles Cuolahan”—her voice was low and deep, and sounded to him like that of an accusing spirit. “Myles Cuolahan, where are the children?”

Instead of turning round to speak to her, he moaned an inarticulate reply, and still keeping his face to the window, he backed to the bed and sat down, his head in his hands.

“Myles Cuolahan,” she repeated, “where are the children?”

He only groaned, for it was with him as with David when Nathan turned upon him and said, “Thou art the man.”

Where were the children? He only pointed with his hand to the corner where lay the

mattress with its dreadful burden, and waited for the cry of horror which was to follow. But no cry of horror came.

"Is the man mad? Myles Cuolahan, you have been drinking again this morning; and it is only two o'clock."

He was too much shaken to say anything; but the words fell upon him as if they were a dream. You see, he was living still in delirium and the crime of the night.

There were steps of children and the prattle of voices on the stairs. They might be, thought Myles, if that was possible, the voices of Jack and Norah. They even came into the room—the steps and the voices—and his brain went round, because he thought they were the accusing spirits of the slain. Was it an accusing spirit that laid two little hands upon his knees, and pulled aside his fingers from his face, crying "Dada—dada"? He sprang to his feet, with a sudden gesture and a wild cry, then looked round.

"Miss Ferens! The childher!"

Then he pushed his visitor roughly to one side, and looked at the mattress. It was just as he had seen it the day before, covered with

its single blanket—no mangled remains of murdered children, no blood and dreadful evidences of the crime, nothing at all ; and staring him in the face were the laughing eyes of his little Norah, Jack with, for once, a hard, resentful look, and Miss Ferens, the district visitor. He caught the little girl in his arms, and kissed and hugged her, laughing and crying together, for it came upon his mind suddenly how the whole dreadful thing was a dream, and he had not killed the children after all.

"It's a dhrame," he said, keeping the child in his arms. "It's a great, big, ugly dhrame."

"It's no dream, Myles," said Jack solemnly. Myles turned ashy pale.

"It's no dream, Myles. Ma'am, he left us all yesterday without a bit of bread, and not a penny to get any with. He went out at nine, and we had no breakfast. Then Norah began to cry, and then I went and begged a slice of bread from downstairs. And he never came home, and we had no dinner, and I was ashamed to beg any more. And it got dark, and he never came back ; and I found a crust in the cupboard, and Norah had it

in water ; and then we went to sleep. In the night I woke up, and Myles was over us with the poker in his hand. . . . See, ma'am, here's the poker"—he drew it out from the mattress. " Standing over us, so, with hand up to kill us."

" It's all true for you, Jack," groaned Myles ; " it's all true."

" He didn't see me when I woke and got up ; and I pulled him away by the arm, and then—you was mad drunk, Myles, or else you wouldn't have done it, you know—he banged and beat his pillow, and then he knelt down and cried because he said he'd killed the children."

Miss Ferens snatched the child from his arms.

" Myles Cuolahan, you are worse than Cain ! "

" I am," he groaned humbly, " I am ; and Abel was a born angel alongside o' me, the blaygaird ! "

His meaning was doubtless good, though his knowledge of Scripture was confused.

" And I looked in your pocket, Myles, and there was a twopenny loaf and a penny."

"I've been dhrunk," Myles murmured, looking up and addressing nobody in particular, "every night for six weeks. And this is the end of it."

"At all events," said Miss Ferens, "it's the end of one thing. You shall not have the children here any longer."

"What will I do then?" he asked.

"You have had delirium tremens. If you drink any more, it will kill you."

"And a good thing, too."

"Perhaps not," she replied grimly. "Now, Myles Cuolahan, you are dangerous. How do I know that you may not have a fit now, and kill us all? I shall take this little girl home with me for to-night. The boy I will take somewhere else. You shall be left alone till you can take care of yourself. Jack, where are Norah's things?"

"She's got 'em all on," said Jack. "So have I."

"I've sold 'em all," said the drunkard, "for whisky. I've sold all my own things, too, and all my sticks. There's nothing left to sell now. Even the bed and the matthrass is lent to me by the landlord."

"If I leave you alone," said Miss Ferens, "you will go out and get drunk again."

Myles turned out both his pockets with a significant gesture which silenced the lady.

"Now, Myles, I'll do this for you, and you shall have one more chance—I will take care of the children for a day or two, myself. If you do not mend your ways you shall never see either of them again. Do you hear? You shall never see them again—not Jack, not little Norah; and you shall be left alone without a friend to help you while you drink and drink yourself lower and lower, till the devil clutches you by the throat and bids you kill yourself. And your child shall never know even the name of her drunken, worthless father."

She took Norah in her arms, and Jack by the hand, and turned to the door. Jack left her, and ran back to Myles.

"Never mind, Myles. Don't cry. You didn't mean to kill us, you know. It was only the drink."

"Oh, Jack! Jack, darlint!" Myles groaned, spreading out his hands in distress.

"Come, Jack," said Miss Ferens. "If

Myles reforms he shall have you back again;" and disappeared, shutting the door behind her.

For a while Myles sat brooding, motionless. Then he stood up, and mechanically put on his boots and his hat; and then a curious change suddenly fell upon his face—a look of desire, of cunning, of devilry, while the saddened air of repentance vanished. For Myles was hungry, and the demon of drink had seized him again. He stole down the stairs and into the street, and stealthily made for the Fox and Hounds. Looking up and down the street to make sure that Miss Ferens was not watching him, he stole into the place, and carelessly nodded to the landlord.

"Bring Misther Cuolahan's score," said that great man, calling to a potboy. "You're come to pay for last night, I reckon."

Myles's face fell, and he shook his head.

"Then, Misther Cuolahan, as you don't pay, and as there was a fight last night—and there always is a fight when you and Patsy M'Nulty do come together—and the police have been here to-day, you don't get any more drink here till you've paid for your last, and that's thirteen shillins and twopence-

ha'penny. So you'd better get out of this, and get some money."

He turned and went away, wandering up and down streets, and whenever he passed a public-house a wild longing seized him, and he looked into the bar, if it was only to see and smell the drink. But if the Fox and Hounds would not trust him, no one would.

There was nothing that he could turn into money, for his pockets were empty : there was not even a pipeful of tobacco to console him, and his pipe was broken ; and of all wretched men in Sheffield that day, Myles Cuolahan was the most wretched.

Presently he found himself, as he strolled carelessly along, one of a great crowd listening to a man preaching. He stopped and listened too. It was on a dismal stretch of road and blank space lying outside the town, and some hundreds of people were gathered together, while one man spoke to them. He was a stout, well set-up man of fifty or so, handsome and florid in looks, with shaven cheeks, full rich lips, and an aquiline nose, dressed something like an English clergyman. Myles felt the voice of the man, even before he knew

what he was saying, thrill through him, and make him tremble; for in the shaken and shattered state of his nerves he was open to any emotion. He pressed through the crowd, which, somehow, parted easily to let him through, and, getting gradually to the front, stood in front of the speaker and listened.

“ ‘Tis Father Mathew, bedad ! ” he said to a man standing by.

It was Father Mathew, the apostle of temperance, haranguing the Sheffield people on their great sin of drunkenness. Myles listened, while his conscience smote him more and more. Presently he trembled and turned pale, for Father Mathew began to describe, almost step by step, his delirium and madness. Yes, all of it—how the clothes of the children went, and the furniture and—“ Some one’s told him,” said Myles—and how the drunken man in his frenzy took the poker to murder the little ones—“ He’s seen Miss Ferens this morning,” said Myles.

He heard no more; for when the preacher went on to talk of other things, he stood still, gazing into space, with the re-awakened horror of the night upon him. Stood still, while the

preacher ended and the people crowded round him to take the pledge, jostling him about; for his heart was mad with shame and remorse, and he could neither move nor speak.

The crowd dispersed, and Father Mathew, looking round, saw this man almost alone, standing pale and motionless, with quivering lips and fixed eyes. He knew the symptoms.

"My poor man!" he said, with his strong Irish accent and his full, rich voice, "what will I do for you?"

"Father Mathew," groaned Myles, "where was ye hid last night to see it all? 'Tis all true. I was mad with the whisky, and I tried to murdher the childher, just as you tould all the people. Don't tell 'em that 'twas myself that done it."

"I only help those who help themselves," replied the priest.

"And will ye give me the pledge, your riverence?—and me a Prodesdan, and a black, murdherin villain to boot! Will ye give me the pledge that will cure me for iver?"

The preacher hesitated. Finally, and after much exhortation, he consented to take his promise.

"I, Myles Cuolahan, promise to abstain from all intoxicating liquors, and to prevent as much as possible, by advice and example, intemperance in others."

Myles repeated the words after him, bare-headed, solemn. Then he signed the printed form.

"God grant you grace and strength to keep your pledge," said Father Mathew.

"And now, Myles Cuolahan, where do you live?"

Myles told him; and then, encouraged by his recent solemn vow, began to tell him all his story; to which the priest listened as if his time was not valuable, only bidding him walk with him, as he had another appointment to keep.

They passed a cookshop in the street. Myles turned a hungry eye upon the window, out of which there issued a volume of steam, full warrant of the richness of the good things within. Father Mathew noted it, and without a word led him in, and sat patiently while he ravenously devoured a plate of meat and potatoes. Then he poured out a glass of water and held it towards him.

Myles sipped it, gave a comical look at the priest, and making a wry face, drank it all up.

"When you get on in the world," said Father Mathew, "you will drink coffee; till then, you must drink water. . . .

"Go home now, Myles," said the priest. "You have had your dinner, and can wait till to-morrow morning. Here is some tobacco for you. Think of your pledge, and wait in all the evening, for I am going to send you a visitor."

They parted presently, and Myles never saw the good priest again.

Myles went home. He no longer wept; he walked erect, in his pocket the pledge that was to save him from himself. He had had a good dinner; he had a handful of tobacco; and, with a light heart and clear conscience, he sprang up the stairs.

But his heart fell at sight of the wretched room, the scene of all his troubles—deserted, too, for the children were gone; and he sat down on the bed and pulled out his pipe with a depression that surprised him. Even the memory of the pledge failed to put him in good spirits.

At six o'clock, or thereabouts, some one ran up the stairs. It was little Jack, who opened the door, and creeping quietly in, sat on the bed and threw his arm round Myles's neck.

"I'm not afraid, Myles," he whispered. "Miss Ferens has got Norah; but I won't stay where she sent me, and I've come back here. I've had dinner, and tea too. You won't do me any harm, will you, Myles?"

Myles pulled out the pledge, with great pride, and showed it to the boy; and then they spent an hour in building castles in the air of the great things they would do, now there was to be no more money spent in drink. But then Myles grew silent, and began to walk up and down the room, slowly at first, but presently faster and faster. At last he cried out, as if the dreadful truth were extorted from him—

"Oh, Jack! the pledge hasn't cured me at all at all; and I've got a live devil inside o' me again! What will I do?"

Jack looked on in terror while Myles paced the little room, with his wild eyes rolling backwards and forwards, and his body swinging uneasily, as if he were at sea in a rough night.

There was to be one more visitor, though, in this, the most eventful day in all Myles Cuolahan's life. A doctor, this time, who called about eight o'clock. Finding the room dark, he went away and bought candles, without saying a word. Jack lit one, and he turned to the patient, whose story he knew already from Father Mathew.

"Take off your clothes and go to bed," he said, keeping his eyes full upon him.

Myles obeyed without a word, but there was a dangerous glimmer in his look as he shiftily glanced at the doctor. Jack saw his eye catch at the poker, and instantly edged away in its direction, seizing it furtively when Myles's back was turned.

He was in bed, but his eyes rolled backwards and forwards with a strange and dreadful wildness.

"Go downstairs, boy, and bring me a glass and a jug of water."

Jack, glad of an opportunity of getting the poker out of the room, hastened on his errand.

The doctor sat down and looked at his patient. Myles said never a word, but glanced

uneasily at his bedside, as if with a desire to escape.

When Jack came up, the doctor put some crystals into the tumbler, and poured water over them.

"Now, Myles Cuolahan, my fine fellow, you've got to go to sleep; and it's no use you trying to keep awake, because this is hydrate of chloral, and go to sleep you must. Leave off rolling your eyes, my man, and drink it off."

Myles drank it, and lay back. For a minute or two he kept his eyes shut. Then he started up in bed and began to moan. The doctor laid him back.

"More chloral," he said. "Now, Myles, I've got to see you asleep before I go; and perhaps there will be other drunken rascals besides yourself waiting for me to-night. Now, then, off you go."

Again the doctor dosed his patient, and time after time he started back to sleeplessness and torture. As for Jack, he had long since fallen back upon his mattress, and was now sleeping soundly, wearied out with the last night's watching and terror.

"We must try something else, then," said the doctor. "You mustn't take any more chloral, though your nerves are like so many red-hot wires. Now, Myles, look at me."

He bent over him, with his eyes full upon the raving man, and compelled him to look him in the face. Then he made a few passes with his hands, and Myles closed his eyes. He had fallen into a sleep, at first mesmeric, and then natural.

"Sleep now," said the doctor, "for twelve hours, and you will be cured. Wake up once, and you will be a raving maniac."

It was past twelve o'clock when he got his patient comfortably off. He had had but little sleep the night before: the thought crossed him that if Myles awoke it might be death to the boy, and so he stayed and watched by the bedside. From time to time he listened to the breathing of the sleeper: it was full, deep, and regular.

At three o'clock Jack woke up. "Let me watch now," he whispered. "I am not afraid of him."

"Wake me if he moves or opens his eyes." And, throwing himself on Jack's mattress, the doctor was asleep in a moment.

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It was at two o'clock in the afternoon that Myles Cuolahan woke up. Jack was by his bedside. "Myles," he whispered, "have you had enough sleep? The doctor said you was to sleep till you woke up of your own accord."

He sat up in bed and looked round. Everything was changed with him. The delirium had passed away with the blessed sleep: his forehead and his hands were cool: his eyes were calm: he remembered all; and, better than everything, the first thing he thought of was the pledge.

"Jack, asthore, it's a happy man I am this morning, and yesterday was a blessed day. And now I'll get up."

## CHAPTER IV.

MISS FERENS came to see him the next day, but without Norah.

"Of course," she said, "I shall not let Norah come back yet."

"Av coarse," said Myles humbly.

"Not till I am sure that you intend to keep the pledge that you have taken. And even then—but we shall see. Now, how are you going to live? Have you got no money at all?"

Myles shook his head.

"How much do you want to start you with?"

"There's Jack," he said, "he's had no breakfast, and he'll have no dinner—no more shall I, for that matther."

"I will find breakfast and dinner for both of you. But to start you in trade again?"

"Tinpence will do it, with the blessin' of the Lord."

"Tenpence—ten—pence?"

"It's this way," said Myles. "With tin-pence I buy a thousand needles—that's tinpence. I tie them up in bundles of five-and-twenty. Four five-and-twenties is a hundred—five two hundreds is a thousand—four—tens—tens—bad sthress to 'it! how much is it?"

"Forty, I suppose."

"I never could learn the multiplication table. When I was Jack's size there, I went to Misther M'Brearty's school in Belfast. The sight of them rows of figures always made me ill, and Pat M'Brearty told my father wunst that I was a born dunce. So says my father, taking the book to him in one hand and a mighty big stick in the other, 'Myles, let's learn the tables.' You see, my father was very long-sighted, and obliged to hould the book close to the candle, where I could see it too; and, bedad, I rattled off the multiplication table like Alexander the Great. So my father went to see the masther. 'Bad end to your sowl,' says he, 'Myles knows his

tables.' ‘Does he?’ says M‘Brearty. ‘Let’s have him up, then.’ So I was had up again, and bruk down.”

“But about the needles, Mr. Cuolahan?”

“Forty, was it? I sell the needles at a penny a bundle, and I get forty pence—forty; and I gave tinpence for thim—that is thirty pence profit, isn’t it? Lend me tinpence, miss, and I’ll bless you for iver. I’ll keep the pledge, niver fear. For I’ve had a lesson, and I’m a changed man.”

Miss Ferens lent him the tenpence, which Myles returned the day after, and the new life began in earnest.

A changed man, yes; but, though the delirium had left him, the craving after strong drink was strong upon him still, and for many and many a day Myles Cuolahan could not pass a public-house without a feeling as if strong ropes were dragging him to its doors. But changed, save for the same liability to temptation; and poor Biddy’s prophecy was not destined to come true. “Lave it?” she had cried in her bitterness. “They never lave it.” She reckoned without the lesson which a night’s misery was to give her

husband, and without the eloquence of Father Mathew ; for Myles left it. Thenceforth he was like a son of Rechab, inasmuch as, for a vow he had made, he would taste no strong drink for evermore. At first his ways were feeble and his steps trembling ; for every street has its taverns, and every tavern has its long, invisible tentacles, like some gigantic polypus, stretched out to claim and drag to its nest some poor sinner like Myles. It was only in the evening, when safe at home, that he felt happy. There—for his trade was a prosperous one, and the money was no longer spent in whisky—he would sit talking over his early days in Ireland with little Jack, smoking his pipe after the day's fatigue, and drinking strong coffee, which Jack made for him.

There was considerable annoyance felt in certain circles at the defection of Myles Cuolahan. Others had left the club at the Fox and Hounds before, for different reasons, indeed. There were generally a few who enjoyed the privileges of non-resident or foreign membership, some being retained by the extraordinary affection of the Newgate and Millbank warders, some being away in the country on

business, some perhaps laid up in hospital, working off the effects of the last free fight. But none, up to this moment, had gone over to the enemy; there had been no temperance man in the club, and it was strongly felt that the resentment of the members should in some form be conveyed to the offender.

Mrs. Patsy M'Nulty, the little Welshwoman, undertook to be the representative of the wish, and in that capacity paid a visit to Myles one evening, when he had just made his coffee, and was sitting with Jack in calm meditation on his own victory.

She knocked at the door, came in softly, and sat down, after shaking hands with Myles and patting Jack on the head.

She talked, as I have said already, nothing but the finest book English, quite like an old-fashioned novel.

" You are quite well, Myles Cuolahan ? And what is the reason why you have abandoned your former associates ? Has prosperity so far changed your disposition towards my husband and the rest as to prevent your meeting them again in friendship ? "

" Mrs. M'Nulty," returned Myles with pride,

"I have taken the pledge. Will ye have a drop of coffee?" She shook her head, and taking a little bottle out of her pocket, removed the cork, and ostentatiously took a longish pull. Then she handed it over to Myles, who took it mechanically, and held it to his nose. It was—it was, indeed—the finest Irish whisky, and for a moment, while his heart melted to his old friend, his knees shook and his hands trembled. Then little Jack, who was watching the proceedings with an anxious eye, quietly took the bottle out of his hand, and gave it back to the woman.

"Myles only drinks coffee and tea now," he said. "Don't tempt him with the whisky."

"Tempt him!" she cried, flashing into a white-hot rage. "I tempt him? Let me tell you, youthful offspring of the devil, that I tempt no one. What! cannot Myles Cuolahan follow the inclinations of his heart without the interference of a child? Are you again in leading-strings, Myles Cuolahan? Will you be put back into the cradle? Shall we dress you in long clothes? Shall we give you to Jack to carry about the streets? Are you——"

"All the same, Mrs. M'Nulty, I've taken the pledge, and I'm not going to meet your husband at the Fox and Hounds any more."

"Then, Mr. Cuolahan," she replied, rising with the dignity of a duchess, "if you will not drink with my husband, you shall fight with him. I'm going now to fetch him from the club. We shall be back in the court in five minutes. We will see, Mr. Cuolahan who takes the pledge—Mr. Cuolahan who is led by the nose by a measly little boy—Mr. Cuolahan who will not drink whisky—which is the best man. Poor Myles! Patsy M'Nulty will grind you and crush you to powder."

She was a very extraordinary young woman this, because, though she was in a furious rage, being indeed a lady of a disposition as fitful and as uncertain as the sea of Galilee, she spoke no faster, and only articulated her words a little more clearly; only, when she had finished, she brandished the bottle in Myles's face triumphantly, pulled out the cork, and took another long pull. After which she went quite peacefully away.

"Myles, must you fight?"

Myles nodded, and made such preparations as the exigencies of the case allowed ; that is, he tightened his waistband, loosened his shirt-collar, took off the long, many-pocketed coat, and then, followed by Jack, he walked slowly down the stairs, and out into the street without his hat.

Myles, although anxious to be first in the field, found Patsy M'Nulty waiting for him, and shook hands warmly with his old friend. Neither made any reference to the impending combat ; but, after congratulating Patsy on his recent victory—he had defeated the Tipton champion only a week before for twenty-five pounds a side—he recognized a few other friends among the crowd, and prepared for business by turning back his shirt-cuffs. Mrs. M'Nulty, with a keen look of expectation, sat in the front row of the stalls, so to speak, like a critic on a first night. The woman was one of that class who, in Spain, attend every bull-fight, in Rome would have gone to every exhibition of lions and Christians, and nowadays take pleasure at Hurlingham. She was, as her husband once mildly complained, almost too fond of fighting.

Round one.—I think I have mentioned Myles Cuolahan's gigantic hand; to the big hand was attached a wrist of iron and an arm of steel. He was small, spare, slight, but he was active. His antagonist, a big, heavy man, would have been more than a match for Myles, but for one thing—he was in bad condition. A fortnight's training had been followed by a week's steady drinking, and Patsy was puffy. First blood, and frantic cheers for Patsy.

“Patsy M‘Nulty! Patsy M‘Nulty! Death to the teetotaller!”

It was not Mrs. M‘Nulty who interrupted the business of the fight by any such vulgar cry as this; it was quite a common outsider, a lady of no education, of Sheffield extraction, with no eye for the artistic beauties of a fight.

Quite the contrary. Mrs. M‘Nulty sat perfectly quiet; and when the apparent advantage came to her husband, she was the only one who observed that it was not real, and that a great deal of force was expended by her husband with a very small result—only, in fact, a scratch. She nodded approvingly to Myles, as much as to say that it was very neatly done on his part; only a single inch less to the left,

and Patsy's big fist would have finished the fight at once. As it was, a mere trifle of flesh off the cheek—nothing.

\* \* \* \* \*

Round twenty.—The fickle populace. They are cheering Myles now, for Patsy M'Nulty is rolling about like some great three-decker in a storm, with its rudder gone. His great, good-natured face is beaten into a huge pulpy mass; his eyes are bunged up; his nose is bleeding; his mouth is swelling fast, and in front of him, as lusty as when he began, is Myles Cuolahan, his bright eyes sparkling, his lips set back, his whole frame dancing with the delight of battle and victory. Finally he plants a tremendous blow, which resounds like the stroke of a hammer on an anvil, in the chest of his mighty antagonist. Patsy M'Nulty reels and falls, and rises no more. Myles is the victor.

Mrs. M'Nulty claps her hands, not because her husband has fallen, but because the battle has been conducted on the soundest principles of art, and with considerable skill on both sides. And presently the festive party breaks up, Patsy being led home by his wife, who expatiates on the various rounds, all the time

she is attending to his bruises, as if she were herself a Professor.

Myles is dragged by a few attendants in the direction of the Fox and Hounds, but breaks away, and peaceably goes home with Jack. Then popularity becomes contempt.

“Ugh! Ugh! Teetotaler—Myles the teetotarel.

“You’re a fine lot,” said Myles, feeling his wrist, which began to show signs of having been too hard worked. “You’re a poor lot. Ye shouted when I went down, and ye shouted when Patsy went down. Jack, niver you mind how people shout; they’re only like dumb sheep that follow the leader—like the Belfast Orange boys when they sing ‘Croppies lie down.’ I’m proud o’ meself, Jack, and proud of the pledge; but then—’tis the devil not to drop in, in a frindly way, after the fight too, for a *shan aghan*. What wud my father say, and my grandfather, an’ all the Cuolahans, to see me going away home to have coffee with my pipe afther a fight?”

Next evening Miss Ferens called upon him, bringing little Norah.

“Good heavens! man, what is the matter?”

For Myles's face had a patchy appearance, swollen in some places and dented in others, a strip of plaster crossed his forehead, and another adorned his lip, while a huge discoloured stain upon his eye showed where Patsy's fist had found a temporary home.

"He's been fighting," cried Jack in great glee; "he's been fighting Patsy M'Nulty."

Myles stood in a deprecatory attitude. "It is all true," it seemed to say. "I am the conquering hero; but not too much praise, if you please. Do not overrate what is really a small episode in a glorious career."

"You disgraceful man!" said Miss Ferens.

Never had the current of Myles's thoughts been so strikingly disturbed, except, perhaps, on that memorable day when he awoke and, behold! it was but a dream. No praise at all then.

"You disgraceful man."

"It was Patsy M'Nulty," Jack interposed. In his eyes the victory of Myles over that great bruiser was more glorious than Blenheim.

Myles said nothing, only looked straight before him.

"Fighting, indeed! . . . and for a man who has only just taken the pledge!"

Myles pulled it out of his pocket, unfolded and read it, with a dreadful fear that there was something in it against fighting.

"Now, Myles Cuolahan, I came to see you this evening on important business, and I am sorry indeed to see you in this deplorable condition."

"I bet him," murmured the discomfited Myles.

"Now listen. It has long been on my mind that you are not a proper person to bring up a child like Norah . . . not a proper person at all."

"Jack always washed and dressed her," said the poor father.

"Jack can't go on always washing and dressing her. Besides, Jack must work for himself. I am going to take Norah from you. . . . Don't look indignant, Myles; it is for your own good. I do not live in Sheffield, I live in Bedesbury. Norah shall stay with me and be my daughter. I will educate her and be kind to her . . . yes, Myles, I will be very kind to her"—her plain features

softened as she spoke—"very kind to the little one. When she is fifteen or sixteen, she shall herself choose whether to live with you or with me. You shall see her as often as you please, say two or three times a year."

"And Jack too?"

"And Jack too. You will leave this dreadful place, and go back to your old life on the road, but without the drinking. Send me every week what you can save, and remember that you will be saving for the child."

"Ay . . . But Jack can't go on the tramp yet. He's too little. What will I do about Jack?"

"Never mind me, Myles," said Jack, with the wisdom of thirty. "You get away from here, and I'll do, somehow."

"Mrs. Bastable wants to have you, Jack; but I don't know."

"If Mrs. What-is-her-name," observed Miss Ferens, "wants Jack, and she is a respectable person, you had better send him there."

"You wouldn't like Jack, as well as Norah, mum?" said Myles with an ingratiating wave of his hand. It was so big, and now so swollen

with the recent fight, that it was like waving a fan.

"Certainly not . . ." replied Miss Ferens. "Certainly not; that is . . ." observing Jack flushing with wounded pride—"that is . . . I could not possibly have a boy in my house; a little girl I should like, but no boys. I could not bear the responsibility."

It was late when she went away. But she bore with her, triumphantly, little Norah, sound asleep in her arms. And as she drove back to her lodgings a smile of triumph lay upon her lips.

"I do not expect they will find their way to Bedesbury. Norah, my darling, we will be all in all to each other. You shall be my child, the child the Lord ought to have given me long ago. . . . Myles will break the pledge . . . they always do. He will get killed in some drunken brawl. The boy will disappear in this great town, or go up to London, or somewhere, and you, my Norah, shall never know your parents, and shall be my own daughter, my pride and my joy, my pretty, pretty, black-eyed darling."

"Bedesbury, Jack," said Norah's father,

undressing for the night—"remember Bedesbury. Miss Ferens is right about Norah. About the fighting I don't know. Father Mathew said nothing against it ; and, well—maybe, the next fightin' she won't hear nothing of. Mrs. Bastable wants you, Jack, to make you a page, she says. She's a quare crayture, and her husband's a quare crayture. She's the fool, and he's the knave, so it's betwix and between. They'll be good to you ; we'll try them for a month, and if you don't like it then we'll try something else. On the tramp again ; well, I'll miss poor Biddy, and I'll miss you, Jacky, and I'll be a lonely man ; no dhrink and nothin'. Put out the candle, Jack."

## CHAPTER V.

MR. BASTABLE, justly considered one of the most remarkable men in Sheffield, lived with his wife in one of a long row of houses, all exactly the same in appearance, colour, and age, which formed a narrow street in one of the poorer quarters of the town. His profession, according to a zinc plate affixed to the door, was that of "Herbalist and Bird-stuffer;" and in the window, to show that he was not a liar, stood a case filled with birds which had once been stuffed. It was so long ago that they were tumbling off their wires in various stages of decay, and lay about, some with eyeless sockets, some with the stuffing come out in a shameful manner, some with featherless tails and wings—a gruesome spectacle, reminding the travelled native of the Natural History Department in the British Museum,

and conveying to the untravelled a new view of nature's wonders. On a dish beside the glass case stood, in further confirmation of his professional pretensions, a bundle of herbs, black and withered, which might have been groundsel, or chickweed, or anything. No doubt they were rare and valuable, culled on the higher slopes of Himalaya, and possessing curious medicinal properties known only to their owner. Though the front room thus appeared to be the surgery or consulting-room, it was in the "back parlour"—I quote Mrs. Bastable—where Mr. Bastable received Myles Cuolahan when he brought Jack for final inspection after Miss Ferens's last visit. This was much the larger room of the two, because Mr. Bastable, at considerable expense, had built out an addition to it in the form of an arched alcove about ten feet broad and the same deep, where had been formerly a window. For some purposes of his own he had provided the back of this recess with tightly-closing shutters, by which he could exclude every glimmer of daylight. At present the shutters were not let down, and the full light of day, with such brilliancy of sun as you might

expect in Sheffield at twelve in the morning, streamed in through the small window upon Mr. Bastable and his belongings. Red curtains of heavy texture, but rusty colour, were looped up on either side of the recess ; its floor was raised about six inches above the level of the rest of the room, and was covered with canvas, on which was painted a strange device, which Jack was as yet unable to explain. It was, in reality, a circle with the twelve signs of the zodiac. Pushed carelessly into a corner was a chair, the like of which, for magnificence, Jack had never seen ; for it was overlaid with scarlet cloth, it had gilded feet, and on the cloth, embroidered in gold, was a large Jerusalem cross, very gorgeous to behold. The rest of the room had nothing remarkable in it ; in fact it was empty, except for a common deal table and a couple of cane chairs ; and there was no carpet.

Mr. Bastable requested Myles to sit down, and then began to examine the boy—feeling the suppleness of his fingers and looking at his eyes, as if he were purchasing a colt or a slave—talking all the while.

“ Yes, Cuolahan, yes—we want a boy some-

times ; not for odd jobs, but for business that requires a lad something out of the way. This boy—he's very young—arms pretty good—hands a little too large—fingers rather clumsy—pull up your trousers, boy, and show your legs. Ah ! he's very young, very young indeed—but he's good-looking, got the face of a gentleman, somehow—he might suit my purposes. Not your own boy, I believe, Cuolahan. That makes it come cheaper to part with him, don't it ? Well, and what do you put his figure at ? ”

“ Eh ? ”

“ Don't be rapacious, my friend. One boy, for whom I gave a—well—more than you'd believe, ran away only a week after I bought him. What do you think he's worth ? ”

“ Well,” said Myles, a little taken aback, “ he's not worth very much yet, but give him his meals regular with potatoes and pudding, and treat him kindly, and he'll be worth a good deal in course of time ; and he won't ask for any wages.”

“ Wages, man ! I am going to buy the boy—I always buy them out and out.”

Myles seized Jack and dragged him within

the protection of his big fists. “Buy my Jack, will you?”

“Why, he isn’t your son, you know.”

“I may be a Prodesdan,” said Myles, “and a black teetotaler—more’s the pity and the shame—but I’m not a Pagan. He isn’t mine, and he’s nobody’s but the Lord Almighty’s—and would I sell him? Buy my Jack! Come now, Misther Bastable, it’s joking you are—say so, man, or else wait there till I smash ye!”

Mr. Bastable hastened to make the peace.

“Come, I thought you wanted to sell the boy. Look here, Cuolahan, I like the boy’s looks, and he’ll do for me. He’s nine years old. Leave him with me for a year or two while you go on your beat again. I will dress him, feed him, and be kind to him. I don’t beat boys in this house, and I don’t swear at them—whatever others may do,” he added, meaningly.

“ ‘Tis the mistress, perhaps,” said Myles, “undertakes that department, like Pat M’Swire’s wife wid the apprentices in Belfast.”

“No,” replied the other. “However, leave him with me: let him understand that he has got to obey, and we shall all be satisfied.”

"What is it, now, the boy will do? will he stuff birds? Bedad, Misther Bastable, them in the window is in a bad way, wid all your stuffin'."

"Perhaps. I want him to help in the business. My wife, the famous clairvoyante——"

"The what?"

"The clairvoyante. You do not understand. She has the gift of communication with the spirits of the other world."

"'Twixt us and harm," murmured Myles, crossing himself, though he was a "Prodes-dan."

"They told her where to look for such a boy as we want. They mean well, the spirits, though they certainly somehow have an awkward way of showing their benevolence——What is the matter, my friend?"

For Myles shrieked out and began to dance.

"Who was it?" he cried; "Jack, 'twas you. No, 'twasn't. Misther Bastable, you are afther your tricks with me, and ye'd best not. Look here!"

He drew a long pin from his calf, and exhibited it.

"I can't help it," said Mr. Bastable calmly; "things go on in this house that—well, the spirits won't hurt the boy. They told me so. They told me, too, that he is destined to be a great man by their agency—another reason why you should let me have him."

"I must find a place for the poor little chap," Myles said, with a sigh, "for I'm off again on my old beat, and he's too young to come with me. It's a lonely life I'll have; Norah with Miss Ferens, Bedesbury way, Jack all by himself with you, and me alone with the pledge in me pocket and the cowld water lyin' deadly chill in me stomach, for company. Jack, will ye stay with Misther Bastable?"

"If you like, Myles; come back soon and see me—don't leave me altogether, Myles," cried the child.

"I'll come back, niver you fear, Jack asthore. And you'll be a good boy and a credit to yourself and me, and—not take to dhrink, eh, Jack?"

So with scant but hearty farewell he left the lad with his new protector, and departed.

Mr. Bastable was a short, thick-set man, of forty or thereabouts. He had the appearance

of a workman rather than a man of science, as he sat in his shirt-sleeves, with his right arm partly bare. He wore no collar, and a great shaggy black beard, growing far back at the throat, fell over his breast, and left a white projecting chin like an ivory carving in the midst of it. A mass of black hair, thick and curly, lay upon his forehead, which was high, but not broad. His eyes were small, and set close together. His nose was long, not broad, but yet coarse, while his lips were thin. It was the face of a man who at first sight repelled you; after a while you became accustomed to him: but the man had no friends. There are, if you think of it, two great classes of men, the one which has friends, and the one which has only acquaintances. Some men, I mean, go through the world without attaching to themselves a single creature who cares for them—who live without the sympathy, and die without the regret, of any one man or woman. Bastable was one of these: all men distrusted him at first sight; all men grew to tolerate him; none grew to like him or to confide in him.

And then his profession was against him.

When Myles was gone, Jack stood looking at him in his fearless way.

"There are many curious things," said his master—"many curious things that take place in this house, which you need not ask anything about. You saw just now how Cuolahan was pricked with a pin. I don't understand these things, and there's no reason why you should. If I hear knocks at night, and tapplings in the wainscoting"—as he spoke he pointed to the fireplace, whence there came a faint tapping—"like that——"

"It's a mouse," said Jack.

"We'll call it a mouse," said his master ; "I never inquire. If at night messages come to the bedside with taps, I don't ask if they're mice—I only listen and write them down, and then I go to sleep again. If I walk up the stairs after dark, and feel fingers in my hair, I don't say to myself 'That's mice' ; I only stand still, and never move hand nor foot till they leave their hold of me. I don't cry out, because that only exasperates them ; and I don't run away, because that drives them wild ; and don't you."

Jack did not understand one single syllable.

"Chains I have heard—that was mice, perhaps; also banging open of doors, and smashing of crockery if they get enraged—as enraged the best of us will get sometimes—whether wise blessed spirits or sinful men. But that's rare. Only don't you be surprised, whatever you see and hear; and don't you go crying out in the middle of the night, and running down the street yelping, like the last boy I had."

"What should I run away for?" asked Jack.

"What, indeed! What should you say if you was to see the table, this here very identical table, stand up on its hind legs?"

As he spoke, the table began to agitate itself with the agility and grace of a cow, and presently stood up on two legs, presenting its other two to Jack.

"Myles could do that," said the boy unconcernedly. "If he was to try, he could do better hanky than that. I've seen him make a chair walk."

"Did he tell you how he did it?" asked Mr. Bastable.

"Yes, once he showed me how he did it with a string, but I've forgotten."

"Well—now you know what to expect. Go downstairs, and you'll find my wife ; tell her you've come to be the new boy, and she'll give you some clothes."

Jack found Mrs. Bastable cooking in the front kitchen ; that is, she was sitting in front of a great fire on which stood a boiling pot, and she held a hook in her hand. She was a woman of five-and-thirty or so, with singularly light flaxen hair, and eyes of a clear pale blue ; not the cold grey-blue that goes with a cruel disposition, but a distinct light tint that had no grey at all. They were large eyes, too, which would have been lustrous but for a painful look of expectation that always lingered in them. Her features were soft and characterless, as if they had left the sculptor's hands without the final touch. Her hands were large, soft, and extremely white ; and Jack noticed that they shook very much whenever she spoke. At the boy's footsteps she dropped her hook into the fender and gave a little shriek, staring wildly at him.

"I'm the new boy, ma'am," said Jack, advancing boldly, though somewhat startled

by the singularity of his reception. She recovered a little, took him by the shoulders, looked him in the face, and then laughed, patting him kindly on the cheek.

"I thought it was one of Them," she said. "Well, it's thoughtful of him to give me another boy, if it's only for companionship; for lonely isn't the word, I do assure you, when he's gone, and they're about. The last boy ran away, and his mother came and abused Them, she did. Wasn't it shameful?"

"Who did she abuse?"

"The sperruts, my dear. No consideration for me—no thought of the rage they would fall in—no regard whatever to the property. The way the tongs banged about when she was gone, and me left alone in this awful empty place, was more than words can paint, or music tell, or brush can sing. Ah!" She paused, and looked round, whispering, "Are you afraid of the sperruts, boy?"

"I don't know," said Jack. "What do they do to you?"

"They stroke your face on the stairs and in bed—they rap at windows and doors—they call from the fireplace—they make noises all day

long—they get angry, and won't let you sleep at night with their noise. And sometimes you see them—here a head, and there a hand, or maybe a sperrut leg."

"I don't think I should be afraid of that," said the boy. "There used to be dreadful noises all night in our court. Noises don't hurt people."

"Ah!" she replied, "it's very brave of you to say so, and I hope you'll act according, and not go running away, bringing the neighbours down on us, and discredit on a woman who only wants to live quiet. For it's a hard life, after all, though my Benjamin will have it it's a glorious life—chosen, you see, and selected by the sperruts themselves. There isn't a house in all Sheffield—no, nor in all Yorkshire, that's haunted like ours. There isn't a mesmerizer in England that's like my husband; and there isn't in all the world round a clairvoyong like ME."

As she spoke, she stood upright with an air of pride for a moment, and then suddenly dropped her arms to her side, and, while her colour changed and the look of expectation in her eyes grew intensified, gazing into space, she murmured, "He is coming."

Jack thought she was play-acting. At the same time the air about him seemed suddenly cold; and then there were heard rappings about all over the room, apparently under his feet, in the ceiling, behind the fireplace, at the door. He took no notice. The door opened, and Mr. Bastable appeared. He threw a hurried glance at his wife, adjusted her hair, which was in some disorder, smoothed out her dress—Jack noticed that she preserved her rigid look, and neither moved nor gave the least sign of comprehending what was done to her—and then turned to the boy.

“Tut, tut,” he muttered. “Too bad! I sent you down to be dressed. Here, take off all these things.”

He hastily undressed Jack, and looking in a drawer, drew out a suit of green and scarlet cloth, which he put on him quickly and nervously.

“ You are to come upstairs, and you are not to say a single word, mind—not a word. If the visitor speaks to you, don’t answer. Look as if you do not hear him and do not see him. If you dare to disobey me——”

It was the first time the boy had ever been

threatened, and a new feeling came over him of resistance and rebellion. Nevertheless, he held his peace.

The dress which he wore was picturesque and theatrical. It consisted of a green cap, something like a fez, with a scarlet tassel; a green jacket, embroidered with scarlet; and a pair of short trousers, terminating above the knee, where they were gathered in by an elastic band. The jacket was buttoned, so as to hide the common coarse shirt he wore; and Mr. Bastable had dragged off his shoes and stockings, so that he was barefooted as well as barelegged. Altogether the costume had an oriental look, only Jack did not know it.

As for his master, he, too, was metamorphosed. He wore a four-sided pyramidal cap of some black material, with two lappets hanging down, one over each ear. Over his shoulder, suspended by a crimson scarf, hung a sword, whose hilt was studded with sparkling gems, real or false; he wore a broad girdle, covered with the same curious figures that Jack had remarked on the circle round the throne in the alcove upstairs, the signs of the zodiac. But, besides these, there were other

things: the Labarum, the cross and circle conjoined, the turtle's head, plain crosses, plain circles, circles with smaller circles placed within, and trines, the whole interlaced by an inscription, running in and out among the figures, in Hebrew characters. Two daggers lay crosswise over his breast. Beneath all this a pure white linen robe, reaching to his knees; and below them sandals, with red leather fastenings, which crossed each other halfway up his bare legs. His arms—great, massive arms, with enormous sinews standing on them like ropes—were bare, like his legs, save for short brown leather sleeves, on each of which was marked a Maltese cross; and in his hand he carried, when he came into the kitchen, a curious implement, fashioned in ivory or very white wood, which at first looked like a *fantaisie* of intercrossing lines, and finally resolved itself into what Jack soon learned to call the pentacle, that odd fancy of the occult sciences, in which, by means of an equilateral and equiangular pentagon, you get the five senses represented by the five angles; and by joining the angles, and so forming five isosceles, and as many oblique-angled triangles,

you get the functions of the Deity; and by drawing other lines you develop a bewildering mass of symbolism which makes the brain to stagger at the mere contemplation. The mesmerist's face was changed, too; for the great bushy whiskers were brushed straight down, and added to the luxuriance of his long black beard, while the chin, whiter and more polished than before, seemed to stand out in a more aggressive manner. All these details, which I give for the right understanding of the man, were not, of course, taken in all at once by the child; but the general impression produced upon him was, that he was experiencing quite a new set of sensations, and that he was about to witness some very remarkable "hanky," in which he was proudly to bear a part.

In truth, Mr. Bastable's house was the principal scene at that time of what has since become so common as to be passed by, either with a grin of contempt or a deprecatory wave of the hand. "Do not," said a lady to me once—"do not take to table-turning and spiritual *séances*. You are fit for better things." I was pleased and flattered by this

tribute to my superior promise (not since realized), and it was not till I had left her that I began to speculate on what she meant. She meant two things, but I was not certain which she meant. Spiritualism, she thought, must be a humbug, in which case everybody is meant for better things ; or it must be a reality, which up to the present time has done no good for mankind. After all, it was no great compliment ; but it illustrates the attitude which people assume towards pretensions which may or may not be true, but which are nevertheless supported by those whose veracity, *si qua fides*, if there is any trust to be placed in position, education, honour, and the responsibilities attaching to the grand modern word of gentleman, ought to be beyond all doubt. It is not my purpose to write a treatise on spiritual manifestations, either here or anywhere else. I only record what Jack saw and experienced during his stay in the house of the Bastables. As for the woman, she was a clairvoyante by profession. What she did or said was done or said, as in the case of the prophetesses of Delphi, Dodona, and the Syrian shrines, under the influence of a mys-

terious power which, since the oracles are dumb, seems fallen permanently into the hands of gentlemen adventurers like the illustrious Count Cagliostro and Mr. Benjamin Bastable.

There was a certain grandeur in the carriage and bearing of the man when, his preparations completed, he turned to the door and led the way. As he turned, though her back was towards him, the woman turned too, and followed silently, moving as if with a painful effort, her limbs being rigid and fixed. Jack, though nothing had been said, followed too, with a sense that it was expected of him.

They went upstairs, this strange procession of three, all silent, into the mystic, though shabby, back parlour. It was changed since Jack had left it a quarter of an hour before. Then it was poorly furnished, with its wretched table and one or two chairs. Now it had a Turkey carpet upon the floor; tapestry hung round the walls; there was a writing-table, with several curious articles, the nature of which Jack could not guess, in one corner. The little window at the back was closed, and a soft light filled the room, which came

from an opening in the chimney, shaped and coloured like a human eye. On the opposite wall was a mirror, which reflected the rays, and showed that the eye was inclosed in a triangle, over which were certain letters in Hebrew character. In the centre of the room was a circle, formed of forty-nine—seven times seven—small vases, in the midst of which was a triangle formed of three swords. And the alcove itself was hung round not only with the red curtains that Jack had seen there before, but also with rich, heavy drapery of a deep scarlet, against which the throne stood out, splendid in its decorations. It all seemed wonderful and incomprehensible to the boy, who stood at the door waiting.

Mr. Bastable motioned his finger, without looking at his wife, to the throne. She obeyed instantly, though, as in the previous case, she was not looking at him, and seated herself in the great chair. He threw a long white robe, of some curious soft stuff, like a Madagascar lamba, over her. Then he put a white wand in Jack's hands.

"Stand at the door, here, and do not move or speak. If I put you anywhere else, do ex-

actly what you see that I want you to do. Neither speak, nor listen, nor move. And whatever happens, remember that you will not be hurt, *unless you move*. Do you understand? Tell me what you have to do."

"Neither speak nor move. I'm not afraid," said Jack, still confident that he was going to take part in some capital scene of conjuring.

I have, I think, made it clear that he was a child of no education whatever. Consequently, he had not imbibed the idea of superstition—knew nothing about Bogy the Terrible, hobgoblin, or the devil; and, owing to Myles's more than parental care, had not conceived the idea of fear. It never entered into Jack's untutored brain that anybody would deliberately try to hurt him. Fighting—of course between people of the same age, and fairly matched as to physical strength and skill—was one of the delights of life, as he had already experienced. Bigger boys had bullied him; then Jack had learned to show such fight as was in his power, making the process of bullying unpleasant and troublesome to the big victor, and had received such punishment as his oppressor had strength to give. But he

had perfect confidence in grown-up people. It is one of the virtues of the working classes that they are seldom rough or brutal to children. The women whack their own, out of an unconquerable instinct to assert their power in *some* direction, rather than from the wisdom and experience of tried virtue ; the little girls slap the smaller boys and girls, still with a sense of the responsibilities of power ; but the men generally whack no helpless little ones ; and you will find—at least, I have found—that the lads of nineteen or twenty regard their fathers, if not with that honour and reverence which the straight-walking Christians in the higher ranks command, at least as personal friends, who have trodden on Saturday nights, and still tread, the same flowery paths as themselves.

“Where,” asked Bastable, making passes with a wand, “where is he now?”

“Six doors off,” murmured his wife in a hollow voice, her eyes looking farther away than ever.

“Where now?” a moment after.

“At the next house.”

He pulled a string which hung behind the

tapestry at his back ; there were steps in the hall ; the street-door was shut heavily ; the red curtains of the alcove dropped as if by themselves before the clairvoyante ; Mr. Bastle seated himself at his table, and began to adjust his instruments, and the visitor appeared.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE visitor was a small thin man of about fifty, carefully and precisely dressed in a blue frock-coat and white trousers. He carried himself with his head a little on one side, as one who was capable of making shrewd remarks. He wore small whiskers, being otherwise clean shaven. His lips were full and mobile, as those of a sensitive man; and his eyes, when they were not lit with the mirth of a humorous nature, had a far-off look which somewhat resembled the expression in those of Keziah Bastable. When he sat down, his shoulders dropped and his head bent forward, showing that he was one who habitually sat over a desk. Captain Perrymont, of the Royal Navy, was an astrologer and alchemist, an inquirer into old allegories and symbolism; one who thought there was once a time when

people knew a way to lift the veil, and who was spending the best years of his life in trying to rediscover it, in his old house near Esbrough.

Apparently, it was not his first visit to the house, for he did not appear in the least surprised at the preparations. Looking about him with an amused air, his eye fell on Jack, and he drew the boy towards himself and examined him critically.

“ Eh ! the new youngster ? He’s got on the same uniform as the last. Bastable, I’ve told you before that gold lace does not matter. Nice boy ; nice boy : will he stand quiet, or will he scream and bolt, as the other one did, like a nigger paid with hot pitch ? ”

“ He’ll stand quiet,” said Bastable, with an attempt at dignity combined with respect. The effect of great submission and great dignity combined was as ludicrous—only Jack’s education was too incomplete to enable him to see the incongruity of the thing—as if the Archbishop of Canterbury, in full pontificals, were entreating a Royal Duke in plain clothes not to kick him ; or the whole proceeding had the air of being behind the scenes during a dress

rehearsal, provided any of the performers had ever been behind the scenes, and could make the comparison.

"Where's your wife, Bastable?—dressed in all her finery, and shut up in her box? Ah! she might as well be dressed for her kitchen work, you know. What's the good of all these flummuries?"

"Captain Perrymont!—for heaven's sake, sir!—They might hear and be offended. Remember how we failed last time."

"That was because the boy sheered off in the middle."

"Yes, sir; yes,"—Bastable was growing nervous,—“but the books order it so, and I daren't go against the books. And now, Captain Perrymont—now that we have got the greatest and most glorious chance—for heaven's sake don't spoil it by offending Them! The boy's pure, and the woman's deeper gone than ever I knew her before; and I've been engaged for months getting up the details. Do be quiet, Captain Perrymont."

The Captain looked queerly at the man, as if he only half believed him.

"Come, Bastable, if there is anything to be done, let us do it."

"Take my chair, sir. There! Of course you will not speak. You are not afraid!"

"I afraid!"

"I need not tell you, sir, as a master of the divine art, that there is danger—very great danger—if the rules are broken. Boy, stand here."

He placed Jack upright in the circle of cressets, within the triangle of the swords.

"Remember what I told you," he whispered in an agitated voice. "Whatever you see or hear, be silent, and do not dare to move outside the triangle."

He lit the cressets, which at first burned dimly, sending up a volume of white smoke of a pleasant, heavy odour. Then he knelt down in the corner of the room, and began, in a high-pitched monotone, an incantation of which Jack understood nothing. At the same time the great curtain before the alcove fell back, and Jack remembered—the last thing before the smoke curled round him and he could see nothing at all—the figure of Mrs. Bastable, erect on her platform, covered with a purple robe, in an attitude of expectation, one hand raised as if to listen.

The wizard went on with his chant. Captain Perrymont sat in the corner, his chin upon his hand, watching and listening. Outside, the people who live in the present, and are content with the philosophy of the phenomenal, went backwards and forwards in the street, ignorant that a few feet from them was a man performing rites which Catherine de' Medici might have witnessed, and Albertus Magnus invented.

The Captain saw wreaths of white smoke, intertwined like ropes, twisting round and round and forming a cone, the apex of which was under the bright eye in the ceiling. Through this the light fell upon the smoke in coloured rays. The Captain's head reeled as he saw the endless wreaths of smoke curling round and round ; strange sounds, half musical, fell upon his ear ; the perfume mounted to his brains, and the slow monotone of Bastable fell on his ears like the low notes of the organ, without which the hymn is imperfect, and which are yet unnoticed.

He was roused by a voice—Bastable's. The wizard had ceased his hymn : the smoke, tinged with a hundred lights, was curling

round and round; in the alcove stood the clairvoyante, gazing into the mist with fixed and strained eyes.

"What does the boy see?" asked Bastable.

She replied without hesitation: "The smoke of the cressets stands away from the boy like a tent. He hears sounds which are not like the words of any speech; he sees figures moving in the wreaths; human heads and arms. There are faces that come and go. He looks round him, and is not afraid. They beckon and nod at him; he only laughs. Hands clutch at him for a moment, and then fall back in the smoke. He has no fear, because he remembers his orders, neither to speak nor to move. The forms become thicker, and the faces fiercer and more threatening."

"What does the boy see now?" asked Mr. Bastable again, after a pause.

The clairvoyante replied once more, in a clear, cold voice: "The boy is in the first circle of the jealous guardian spirits. He is surrounded by those who would, if they could, take him by the throat and wring the life out of him. But still he is not afraid."

"He is in the circle," whispered Mr.

Bastable, "into which, with all our science, we cannot penetrate, Captain Perrymont. Only the pure in heart—the innocent in intent—can see the things that he sees. When we dissolve the spell, he shall remember nothing."

"What now does the boy see?" he asked again.

"The smoke has changed its colour, from the thick pure white to a pale rosy hue. The angry faces have vanished, and the threatening figures gone. Now he sees forms with glowing robes, and strange, cold faces, which float round and round, seeming not to regard him. He is in the second circle."

"He can pass no further," said Bastable. "No mortal can see beyond the second circle. They are the only spirits we can communicate with, unless the higher spirits come voluntarily. Shall we question them, Captain Perrymont?"

"Ask them if I am on the right track in my great endeavour."

"They hear your question.—Spirits! if it may be, speak to the boy through the clairvoyante."

The answer came, as before, from the

priestess : "The knowledge of old can always be found again. But the secrets of Nature can only be given to those who seek for the good of others."

Captain Perrymont groaned aloud.

"Ask them," he said, "if they are happy."

This time there came no answer at all.

"Ask them of the future," said the Captain.

"Your own ? "

"I know it. It is labour unrewarded till the end. To men like me there is but one future. Ask them to read the boy his future : that matters nothing to any of us."

"Tell us what the boy sees."

The clairvoyante made answer : "He sees a wilderness of chimneys and furnaces ; he sees a forest of masts ; he sees a multitude of men toiling. There is a roar of steam, the clang of machinery, the din of the mighty hammers, the hissing and bubbling of molten metal ; and in the centre, king and lord of all, he sees—himself. The spirits are smiling on him ; they breathe into his face ; they are filling his brain with great thoughts ; they inspire him with strength and fearlessness. Now his senses leave him ; he falls, but they

bear him gently to the ground. The work is done."

As she spoke, the rosy tinge of the smoke changed again into white; the clouds that issued from the cressets suddenly diminished, and the smoke itself disappeared, leaving no trace behind it but the heavy smell of some incense which was never burned in churches. The boy was lying, with closed eyes and head resting on his arm, within the triangle where Mr. Bastable had placed him upright. The curtains of the alcove dropped again, and everything was as it had been before.

"Captain Perrymont," said Mr. Bastable, "to work this miracle of the divining art I have read all books of magic that ever have been written. You have witnessed what no one has seen since the days of the great Paracelsus. He was the last who communicated with the better spirits. I, I alone, possess the secret."

"Can you teach it to me?"

"Perhaps," he answered; "but what is the use? Have you magnetic power? You could not even mesmerize your own son. Have you a clairvoyante to tell you what goes on beneath

the magic bell? Have you a child, pure, innocent, and fearless? I have all. I have tried for years to get such a boy. It is by chance alone that I have succeeded; and how long will he remain innocent? Until the first temptation. When the serpent finds us out, we fall."

"And what have they told us?"

"Captain Perrymont, I have questioned the other world for thirty years. No direct answer can be got from them for questions such as yours. Knowledge must be sought. In every alchemist's books you will find that the secrets are to be wrested from Nature itself; it is the great and universal law. I, too, have tried to get information,"—Mr. Bastable dropped the magician and became again himself. "Once, if you'll believe me, Captain Perrymont, they gave me the winner of the Derby, six months before the event, and when he was forty to one. I actually never backed my moral—let the time go by. Next year came; one of my patrons, a noble gentleman on the Turf, got me to get the information again. Well, sir, I first asked him for a paltry tenner, and then I made him promise me fifty per cent. on all his

winnings. You'll hardly credit me, Captain Perrymont, but the spirruts gave me the wrong horse, and my noble backer was let in for a cool thousand. Then he came here and carried on that shameful against the spirruts as you never heard. There was no peace in the house for months afterwards, neither for Mrs. B. nor myself."

" Well, serve you right for trying to make money out of your knowledge. What do you think about your wife's prophecy, and the boy's future ? "

" There, you see, sir, I don't think anything. She told what she knew. Make no mistake about that ! As for the boy, why shouldn't he get on in the world ? He's a strong boy, and looks a clever boy. Wait a moment."

He removed the cresses, took up the swords, and placed the boy, still unconscious, upon the sofa.

" Now for the other matter, Captain Perrymont. Where is the map of your estate ? "

The Captain gave him a rolled-up plan, which he had been carrying in his hand.

" So . . . The estate is at Esbrough, is it not ? "

"Esbrough."

"I know it—I know it. My wife came from —— Never mind. Show me the map."

He spread it flat upon his table, and took from a drawer a small hazel rod about twelve inches long, pierced in the centre with a hole which had been set with an ivory casing. Through this was passed a green silk string.

"This is the divining rod—*la verge de Jacob*—that you first came to see me about, Captain Perrymont. Now, any one can use this that knows its indications, as I do; but to use it on the plan of your estate, instead of on the ground itself, requires the aid of my clairvoyante. Some people will tell you that the hazel rod must be forked, and held by the two hands. Here is one of these elementary things—mere savagery, Captain Perrymont. You may cut one yourself, and prospect your estate to find water, if you like. That is so simple that any gipsy woman will do it for you; what you are going to see now is a different thing altogether."

He held up his hand, and his wife pushed aside the curtain, and came down from the

throne. She had put off the purple robe ; but her eyes were still rigid, and she moved with the same painful constraint.

Her husband put the thread in her hand, and placed it in position over the map, so that the rod hung free. The map was about four feet by five, and Mrs. Bastable held the instrument exactly over the centre. At first the rod was motionless ; then Mr. Bastable made a few passes before his wife's face, and her fingers held the thread with a tighter grasp.

The rod began to oscillate, and moved round and round, sometimes stopping for a moment, sometimes having one end downwards, but always uncertain.

At every stoppage, Mr. Bastable, who held in his left hand half-a-dozen small glass tubes, applied them rapidly one after the other. Sometimes there was no result ; at other times the rod would incline more decidedly, and stand, so to speak, fixed to the spot. Then Mr. Bastable would make a little pencil mark.

At last, and after many experiments, the tube being always changed, the rod seemed

to become endowed with a sort of volition, and moved, as if with a purpose, from spot to spot. Finally it inclined vigorously to one corner of the map, and when Mr. Bastable applied his tube it pointed one end directly to the place, and refused to move again. Then it pulled, or seemed to pull, the hand of its holder in a direction away from the estate, following the tube.

Mr. Bastable changed colour, and held his breath.

"This piece is not coloured as part of your estate, Captain Perrymont?"

"No; it is Holcotes. There are about a hundred acres of it altogether. This is the worst part. It belongs, I believe, to a man of the name of Bayliss, Paul Bayliss."

"Bayliss . . . I know him," Bastable whispered excitedly to himself. "Paul Bayliss . . . Holcotes, near Esbrough. . . . That will do."

He took the rod from his wife's hands, and replaced it in the drawer.

Then he made another sort of pass, and the rigid look disappeared from his wife's eyes altogether. She seemed to awake suddenly, and laid her hand upon her head as if in pain.

"Where am I? Ah! . . . I remember. Oh, Benjamin, Benjamin! another wickedness! Oh, dear! oh, dear! and me a Christian woman, and my father the parish clerk!"

"Don't be a fool, Keziah! Wake up the boy, and take him downstairs. You've got the dinner to look after."

She shook Jack by the shoulder, who awoke at once and sprang to his feet. Without saying a word, she led him, wondering what had happened, down to the kitchen again.

"She remembers nothing, and the boy remembers nothing, Captain Perrymont; it may be that we shall never again succeed in the great function of magic which you have assisted at. We will try again, but I doubt. As for the hazel rod, that is always at your service. By its means I am now able to make a perfect geological map of your estate, which presents some very curious features."

"I wish it would present some better arable land," said the Captain. "I would sell it all, if I could."

"Don't sell it, Captain," said Mr. Bastable hurriedly. "For heaven's sake, don't sell it yet! See now, I will go over to Esbrough,

and walk round the estate with you. I cannot do it yet, because I have many experiments to make ; but I want to see it very particularly. I do, indeed, and in your interest."

" Will you make me the map ? "

" I will bring it over to Esbrough with me."

The Captain rose. " It will be best," he said, " to tell no one of the scene that you and I have witnessed. Here, Mr. Bastable, is the honorarium which I promised you."

He placed a bank-note in his hand, and went away.

" Paul Bayliss," murmured Mr. Bastable, " Paul Bayliss. The hazel never lies. Now I must think what to do."

Down in the kitchen Jack had resumed his ordinary clothes, and was sitting by the fire, feeling heavy and dazed.

" What did it all mean, Mrs. Bastable ? " he asked. " I thought it was what Myles used to call hanky. But I went to sleep somehow. There was a lot of smoke, and I heard somebody talking, and that is all I know about it."

" Don't ask me," she answered. " I don't know, boy ; I never do know ; I'm all of a

shake. Benjamin hasn't done it before, not for a year and a half, and I thought he was never going to do it again. It's a wickedness and a tempting, it is. O my poor head ! Jack, my dear, lift up the lid and stick the fork in the beef—such a beautiful bit of beef, too, silverside—lovely ; and me not able to eat a morsel of it. Oh ! what a thing it is to be a clairvoyong ! ”

Mr. Bastable, you will have discovered before this, was a professor of the magic art. He did not waste his energies over spirit rappings, and *séances* at half-a-crown a head, where vulgar cheats prove the incompleteness of the spiritual education by their bad spelling. Nor did he tell fortunes by cards ; nor did he tie himself up in knots and be released by spirits in a dark box ; nor did he practise the arts of jugglery. He went in for high art, and boldly attacked the fortress which had been assailed by the great men of old. He read books of magic ; he knew the arts of alchemy, astrology, and conjuration. How far, in the scene we have so faithfully described that many will recognise it, the clairvoyante spoke the truth we know not. All that Captain

Perrymont saw was the bell-shaped cloud of smoke; all that he heard was from the priestess herself. As we have seen, he heard little to do himself any good.

The science of magic sometimes sleeps—it never dies. A hundred years ago the Parisians were flocking to see the miracles performed by a practician not much higher than Mr. Benjamin Bastable—the Count Cagliostro. A hundred years before that, the lamp was handed down in secret, and with much trembling, in the south of France and in London. A hundred years before, the magicians and astrologers held as much power in the courts of Europe as ever they did in the courts of Pharaoh and Belshazzar; and now, when we are in the age of reality, and nothing is believed but what is seen, we are on the verge of another outbreak of belief in magic, to which, perhaps, all the preceding shall be mere child's play. In any great city are men like Mr. Bastable, who live poorly because they will not work at their trade, and whose spare time is wholly given up to prying into the secrets of the other world. What the

spirits tells them does them no good. What the spirits have taught men in all ages has never done them any good. The oracles are dumb, the sacred cone of Delphi is lost, and yet the art of divining, advising, and foretelling has never died. Still, as before, clairvoyance and mesmerism hold men's minds in thrall ; still the world is looking for some new revelation from that dark and mysterious source whence nothing good has ever come ; and now, as before, the thing which a generation ago seemed a part and parcel of the dreadful past, has sprung once more into life to tease and perplex philosophers, as well as fools. The promised fruit lures on the searchers after the unknowable—they are as keen as ever ; and to Captain Perrymont and all his kin, old Chaucer's words on the philosopher's stone might well be addressed this day :—

“ Than thus conclude I, syn that God in hevene  
He wol not that the philosophres nevene  
How that a man schall come unto this stone  
I rede as for the beste, let it goon.”

Mr. Bastable presently appeared dressed in the garb of everyday life, and partook of the

beef, which was overdone ; nor did he make any allusion to the ceremonial they had just gone through.

After dinner he took the boy and gave him some light work in the assaying of metals. It was an uncanny house. Noises went on everywhere, by day and night, at which Mrs. Bastable continuously trembled. When the boy went up and down the stairs he heard voices, and felt invisible fingers in his hair or on his cheek ; any one of the things, indeed, which occurred in that house was enough by itself to make the fortune for ever of an ordinary haunted house. But here they were comparatively unnoticed. The master went about as unmoved as Prospero : the mistress shook and trembled, but expected them ; Jack listened and wondered. Whatever the real truth about these manifestations, one thing is quite certain, that Jack preserves to this day a clear and distinct recollection of things for which no intelligible cause can be assigned. Handbells, placed on the table, rang ; pencils moved about on their pointed ends ; rappings came from behind the fireplace ; tables lifted their straight and foolish legs ; laughter and

groans came from unexpected quarters when there was, so far as Jack and Mrs. Bastable saw, no one to produce them. The boy listened, and was not afraid. He saw that, somehow or other, the noises were connected with Mr. Bastable's presence in the house, and were regarded by his wife with an ever-increasing terror. Then, the noises were manifest to some who came to the house, but not to all. Once the tax-collector, who insisted on waiting till the money was produced, was terrified out of his wits, and rushed frantically from the place. This never happened to the baker or the butcher, who were paid regularly by Mrs. Bastable.

People came to consult Mr. Bastable, who received them in his back room, when Jack waited as page. On these occasions there was a good deal of rapping, and the spirits were called for with a persistence which sometimes drove them into a rage. And noticing that, whatever was done, nobody was hurt. Jack grew familiar with "manifestations" of all kinds, and regarded them with contempt. As regards his work, he learned the elementary experiments in metals which teach the dis-

tinction between iron ore and lead, tin and silver.

As for Mrs. Bastable, she spent her time chiefly in lamenting her lot. Jack, she often said, was the only creature in the world who was any comfort to her; but, as her conversation was wholly confined to relating the sorrows of a clairvoyante and her separation from the common lot of humanity, she was not cheerful company.

People pointed at the house, and made disparaging remarks, too, on the sanity and honesty of its residents, which annoyed Jack when he took his walks abroad. It was not pleasant to have the finger of admiration, or scorn, pointed at you as the magician's boy, or the conjuror's devil; nor is it nice when you are walking with a lady to hear the crowd begin to hoot and cry out at that lady as a witch.

Jack spent two months in this abode of the dead, this last lingering fane of the supernatural. His connection with the Bastables was rudely severed by Myles Cuolahan. For the honest pedlar happened to call at the house while a clairvoyante exhibition was pro-

ceeding. The lady, in her curtained alcove, sat upon the velvet throne staring before her with rigid eyes. Prospero, or rather Mr. Bastable, armed with a wand, made all sorts of passes in front of her. Jack, dressed in Syrian garb, swung a censer before the magician, evidently considering the whole exhibition as one eminently calculated to amuse and instruct the three gentlemen who were paying for it. Myles took in the whole proceedings at a glance; seized the boy by the arm, dragged him off to his bedroom, changed his dress, and bore him back in triumph to the astonished Mr. Bastable.

"Gentlemen all," he said, "'tis only little Jack, and not a haythan pagan, though he was dressed up in green and gold. Misther Bastable, ye'll find another boy, av ye plase, to do yer conjurin' tricks—conjurin' indeed! betther conjurin' I've seen at Pettigo Fair. Can ye swaller a red-hot poker, tell me that? Can ye pass a shillin' out of yer own pocket into mine, tell me that? Can ye lick up a plateful o' fire without so much as winkin', tell me that? Spirits, is it?—what is it, at all, that they do for ye? Come, Jack, we'll

be going. The next time ye want a boy, spick and span new, Bastable, bid him come to me for a charackter, and it's a fine one as we'll give ye. And as for ye"—he turned upon the unhappy three who were about to pay a five-pound note for a spiritual manifestation of a superior order, and now stood aghast at the unexpected turn—"as for ye, ye three poor misguided fools, go home wid ye. Tell yer wives that ye are not to be trusted out alone; and say yer prayers to be forgiven for the wicked tempting of Providence. Bastable, I'll take Jack, and I forgive ye."

## CHAPTER VII.

"BUT what am I to do with you, Jack?" asked Myles, as they left the oracular dwelling of the Bastables. "What am I to do with you at all?"

"I'll go with you, Myles."

Myles looked at the little figure before him critically. He was a sturdy boy, full of life, vigour, and strength; not a delicately pretty boy, with his rough, firm features, but a boy whom mothers of delicately pretty children might sigh to look upon. Everything about him denoted strength, from the curly brown locks, the clear blue eyes, the square forehead, the clean-cut nostril, the projecting chin, down to his sturdy legs. A boy, like his border ancestor, of the strong arm. Some boys dance when they walk; the passing moments play them a kind of waltz, to which

their feet go ever tripping in cadence : these are the imaginative boys ; out of such stuff are made poets, artists, preachers, enthusiasts. Some boys slouch, and of such are made, if they are well born, sensualists of the lower order, and if their cradle be the gutter, habitual criminals. Some boys walk ever gravely at the same pace, never quickening at the agitation of a pulse, never slackening at a disturbing thought : these boys are the successful ones in life ; they follow the beaten track, are never tempted aside from the line of duty, dutifully swim in the current of the world ; they get money, they have children at their desire, their eyes swell out with fatness, and they go to heaven. Other boys there are whose step is a sort of triumphal march ; they dream great things, of what kind they know not yet ; and as they go their feet move in a rhythmic beat to the grand orchestral procession in their minds. Such boys as these are perhaps the happiest of all, for if they succeed they win great names and power as well as fortune ; and if they fail, as needs must oftenest happen, they fall gloriously in the great battle of life. Jack was one of these,

his mind as yet full of grand confidence, and the world teeming with all kinds of glorious possibilities. He knew nothing except to read and write, and to discern the ores. He had no book learning at all : did not know whether the world was round or square ; absolutely could not tell you whether England—I think he had never heard the name of England—was an island or a continent : had not yet, even, though it seems incredible, learned the names of the kings of Judah ; so that what the boy had for the basis of his dreams the Lord only knows.

If you watch a baby asleep you will see the ridiculous little animal every now and then smile in unconscious appreciation of some dream-told joke, some unexpected combination of events, some hilarious recollection, which must have been produced out of the events of his short life. So with Jack. In the squalor and misery of his past life there had been nothing, absolutely nothing, to furnish him with hopes or ambitions. All was mean, pitiful, and degrading ; and yet here he was, at ten years old, with the audacity of a young Prince of Wales, looking forward to a future which

was all, in some undefined way, to be spent in realms of splendour and joy. In Jack's mind, splendour and joy meant work, and the only form of work with which he was acquainted was the assaying of metals and the analysis of compounds.

"Go with me, Jack?" said Myles.

"I've been with you before, you know, Myles."

"And then I had to carry you most of the way, Jack. But it's four years ago, and you've grown since then."

"Carry me?" Jack blushed with shame. "Why, Myles, do you think—— But tell me, Myles, you would like me with you on the road, wouldn't you?—we could talk about Norah, you know; and I could carry the pack when you were tired—and—and—you know, Myles, if you felt inclined to break the pledge, you could tell me, and I'd prevent you."

Myles laughed.

"Break the pledge, is it? Niver a fear, lad. Bedad, barrin' a weakness in the legs when I pass a house, which is force of habit, maybe, I never feel desire for dhrink. Ah! boy, if I'd known before what a good dhrink ginger-

beer is, and how much better you get along with coffee, I'd be a rich man this day. But you shall go with me, Jack, and—don't laugh Jack—I've been reshuming my education at the point where I left it thirty years ago. That was when Misther M'Brearty turned me out of his academy at Belfast. He was a Connaught man, ye know, and a great friend of my father's, bein' almost of as ancient a family. And he used to hang up legs of mutton in the chimney to smoke, and when he was hungry, which was pretty well always, for he had a divil of a twist on him, he would cut off a collop, put it in the frying-pan and eat it whilst he went on wi' the studies. He was an illigant scholar, John M'Brearty; but one day he went out on important business with my father, nothin' short of swearing an alibi for an illicit distiller, and left the school in charge of me and Mike Feargus, one of the poor scholars that used to go up and down Ireland. 'Myles,' says Mike, 'I'm mortal hungry,' looking at the collops. 'Is there time?' says I. 'Lashins,' says he. With that he whips down a leg of mutton, and in a minute the collops was on the fire. Would

you believe the bad luck? Before we'd well finished the first frying-pan full, and were beginning the second, who should come in but the masther and my father! The masther took Mike, and my father took me.

"' My collops, ye young devil!' cries M'Brearty, with the sstrap in his hand over Mike. 'Collops o' mutton!' cries my father, with his big stick over me. 'If it hadn't been Friday I shouldn't have minded, ye black murdherin Prodesdan.'" And then my education finished, for I left school the same day, and my father and all, and a black Prodesdan I've been ever since. A quare religious conversion, wasn't it, Jack? But my father was a *votedheen*, what the Scotch call unco guid."

"And what have you got in your hand, Myles?" asked Jack, impatient at this long story.

"It's a joggreyph book, Jack, and we'll go through it together when we've got a quiet evening to ourselves. Joggreyph and history, the bookseller said it was. Maybe it will throw a light on the dirty Saxons in Ireland. We'll start to-morrow, if it's fine."

Jack's preparations were easily made, and

consisted entirely, having exchanged his green page's suit, in getting together such rougher and stronger garments as might be better fitted for road work, Myles himself superintending his outfit with great care. The finishing stroke was completed by taking off the boy's white collar and wrapping a common red handkerchief round his throat. More depends upon the presence of a collar than would be generally supposed, and I think, respectable reader, you would be surprised at the change in your personal appearance which you may effect by the simple process of tying up your neck with a common red wrapper. However, it mattered little for Jack. He was tired of one life, and was going to begin another. Back to that old life on the road, of which he had the faint recollections that cling about the age of four and five. He could remember being carried in Myles's arms. He could remember the wood fire by the roadside, the camp of gipsies, the cart hung round with brooms and brushes, all sorts of little things. Myles's regular beat was about Yorkshire, with occasional visits to certain towns in the more northern counties; once a year, for instance,

but not oftener, he proposed to visit Bedesbury, and see how his little girl was getting on. Once a week, since his reform left him regularly with money to spare, he sent off his earnings, without keeping account, to Miss Ferens. And it was on this beat that he now intended for a time, at least, to take little Jack about with him. What to do with him afterwards, what was to become of the boy eventually, of course never entered into honest Myles's head to consider.

He carried the pack in a box slung on to his back. It was filled with all sorts of light things likely to be wanted at the farms and cottages. There were pins, needles, tape, ribbon, string, scissors, thimbles, thread, silk, worsted, white twist, and more besides, all in a flat, square box, that lay across the hawker's shoulders, and, by long practice in carrying, caused him no inconvenience at all. In his hand he carried a stout stick. A pipe was stuck in his felt hat; and if you had examined the inside of his coat you would have found it filled with pockets, some of them buttoned up containing money, and some occupied with the small articles of toilet and personal luggage

which Mr. Cuolahan—a man of simple habits—considered indispensable. All Jack's luggage was a little knapsack, picked up a great bargain by Myles, and strapped empty to his back. "The common tramps, Jack," said his patron, "carry all their traps in a red handkerchief. We are respectable hawkers; so you fix up the knapsack."

They started next day at six. The day was fine—one of those clear, cool days in July, when the wind, in the shade, makes you think that summer is hardly yet arrived. They had their breakfast—coffee and bread-and-butter—and were out of the town and well among the fields before the lazy maids had opened the shutters and taken in the milk. Jack walked soberly enough while they were within the streets; but once outside and in the country lanes—for Myles did not affect highroads—he ran and danced about like some little puppy beside its master.

Myles's trade was chiefly in the cottages. He knew everybody on his road, especially the wives and daughters, and was in great esteem among the ladies as one who never went to a public-house, and saved his money.

Thus he acted either as an example or a scarecrow. The affability with which he would sit down, tell a story, drink a glass of milk, and even, as frequently happened, bestow a fatherly kiss upon any of the girls that might be comely, had a good deal to do with his popularity. And then another thing helped: Myles was honest. If people bought a reel of cotton marked fifty yards, there was no need to measure it, because—you see it was twenty years ago—Myles did not cheat, and the manufacturers then were honest. Now, nothing pays so well as honesty if you are in trade. If you are not, perhaps honesty is not so necessary. Considering, then, that Myles had to visit every cottage, to talk to every old woman, to open his pack at least, and to introduce little Jack, it is not surprising that his rate of progress should be slow; and after giving time for all these occupations, and for having dinner and tea on the road — neither of them banquets of great luxury — the first day's work, enough for Jack, consisted of some twelve miles in all.

The day's journey brought them to the manufacturing town of Daylesford. Cuolahan

led the way, the boy dragging tired limbs after him, to a tavern which stood in a by-street. Outside it was a quiet, dingy-looking place, with nothing to mark it but a sign-post swinging from the wall. Inside, those who knew it were wont to say that it was the resort of all the devils in Yorkshire. Thither resorted the better class of tramps, those who unite the doubtful callings of beggar and impostor, ladies and gentlemen who have mostly at different times made acquaintance with the inside of the country's gaols. It must be recorded, perhaps to the disadvantage of Myles, that, though the very paragon of rectitude himself, he regarded the departure from virtue in others as an unfortunate accident due to circumstances, rather than as a thing in itself to cause any rupture of friendly relations with the victim. In other words, Myles Cuiolahan had been, for twenty years and more, out of a life of forty years, a wanderer and a tramp. His lines of life had thrown him among other wanderers and tramps not so honest as himself; and he had learned to regard the habitual criminal as a gentleman who made his living by ways which he did

not follow mainly because he had never had any occasion to desert his own. Some people are honest because they get on in the world. It never does to inquire too closely into motives, but perhaps Myles was one of these : for the licensed hawker makes good earnings, and Myles had very early in life found out the secret that it is best to give people their money's worth.

The landlord was behind the bar, a short, thickset man, with a stubbly beard and a fat spotty face, smoking the short pipe that never left his lips except when he was sleeping or eating. He wore rings on his bloated fingers, had a big gold breast-pin, a huge watch-chain, and looked what he was, an unscrupulous, greedy, sensual creature, with just pluck enough to carry out the plans that his narrow and crafty mind suggested. He grinned a welcome.

"Myles Cuolahan ! It is a year and more since you came here last. What will you drink ? Oh ! I forgot. Well, here's a bottle of ginger beer. And who have you got with you ? "

"We'll have the best room, Misther Coger,

the double-bedded room, and no one else in it. This boy is Jack Armstrong, my boy, you know, that I told you of. He's tired now, poor chap, and we'll have a cup of tea and a chop for supper. Who is in the house to-night?"

"You may well ask who," said Mr. Coger. "I don't suppose there's been such a houseful since I opened this bar. Why, to begin with, there's Captain Cardiff himself, drinking sherry wine by the pint, and smoking cigars at four-pence. None of your yards of clay and two-penny smokes with gin-and-water for the Captain."

"No!" said Myles, slapping his leg. "Cardiff Jack? Why, the last I heard of him he was in Millbank for that little affair you know of —."

"Ay, ay," returned the landlord. "Best say nothing about Millbank to Mr. Cardiff; he wants that forgotten. Then there's General Duckett."

"What's the General doing here?" asked Myles. "I thought he and his boys were always down in Kent."

"So they are . . . so they are. But I think

he is looking out for more boys. Ah, Myles ! if you'd only think of it, what a lovely bonnet that child of yours would make ! ”

Myles put a protecting hand on little Jack, who had taken advantage of the conversation to fall fast asleep on a settle. “ No, no, Coger. You know me. Jack and me are on another lay. General Duckett ! General Duckett ! Why, he must be nigh eighty years of age.”

“ Eighty if he's a day ; and as fresh and spry as most men of sixty. But there's lots more behind. There's Shallow Bob, the turnpike sailor ; there's Liverpool Joe, the quack ; there's the fellow with the queer name—what is it ?—the foreign chap, with his patter and his religion. We never were so lively before. You don't drink as you used, Myles ; and I'm sorry for you, because they will have their joke.”

“ All right, Coger, all right. We'll have a jolly evening, though I am a teetotaller. Send us in the chops, will you ?—Wake up, Jack my boy. You shall have your supper and go to bed presently.”

He woke up the boy, and they passed on into the inner room.

## CHAPTER VIII.

A FORMER proprietor had constructed at the back of the house a long and tolerably lofty room, designed—for it was before the invention of music halls—for a free-and-easy or harmonic meeting-room, one of those delightful retreats which still flourish in country places, combining all the actual evils of the music hall with none of those undeveloped possibilities which the latter possesses for the improvement of popular taste. The first builder and original owner of this temple speedily found himself so far deceived by the smiles of Hope that one night, after carefully emptying the contents of the till, disposing of his spirits to private friends, and entertaining a select circle with a farewell symposium, at which all that was left of the beer was consumed, he was fain to “shoot the moon,” and

was no more seen. His successor for a time maintained the free-and-easy, and then, the place becoming under his benignant rule more and more a chosen house of call for tramps, he reserved it for them as a saloon or withdrawing-room, where they might spend their evenings in the mutual exchange of ideas, in intellectual conversation, or in the cultivation, by means of the higher classical music, of their æsthetic faculties. It also served as a kitchen for the preparation of supper. There were two fireplaces, one at each end of the long room.

The evening was warm, and only the supper fire was burning when Myles and Jack entered. The windows were closed; the smoke of sausages, bloaters, and chops, with that of twenty or thirty pipes, and the fragrant memories of many thousands of such evenings as this, imparted to the room a smell which was like a London fog, inasmuch as it was so thick as to be almost visible—a smell which might have been savoury in the nostrils of a Homeric god—a smell which a chemist might study with curiosity—a smell which could never be forgotten. The science of

smells is yet in its infancy. They have not been even classified, yet some rude classification is possible to the most shallow thinker. There is an acrid, penetrating smell, such as I once experienced in visiting Greenwich Hospital Chapel on a Sunday in summer, just after service. It haunts one for weeks. That particular smell—which was a chemical compound of boy, beadle, and corduroy, and although a compound, was one and indivisible, with an individuality of its own—haunted me for months. There is, next, a keen and sharp smell which runs you through like the point of a bayonet, and makes you yell and suddenly drop. This you may get in a hospital. There is a smell which is like the blow of a hammer, and knocks the sense out of you. It may be found in the forecastle of a ship anywhere about the region of the Doldrums or in the Red Sea. There is the smell of a poultry shop, the smell of vinegar, the smell of niggerdom, the smell of burning paper; but all these smells are like mignonette, heliotrope, otto of roses, wood violet, lily of the valley, blackberry jam, or the perfume that rises from your Lesbia's tresses, com-

pared with the turbid mixture of all vile smells which floated about the atmosphere of this room, and gave it a character peculiar to itself. You remembered the place, not by the fat cook who, with bare arms and ruddy cheeks, stood over frying-pan and gridiron, tossing from time to time fish, flesh, or sausage, as it was done, into three dishes that stood before her. You might forget the cook. You might even forget the little crowd that was congregated round her waiting their turn—boys and men, women and girls. They were tramps; they belonged to the population which is called floating; they were the dregs and refuse of the English-speaking race; they were a mixture of gipsy, pedlar, and Irish vagrants. They sat, or stood, or leaned against the wall, without much talk, waiting to be fed, the eyes of each fixed steadily upon his own portion. As it emerged from the frying-pan, each in turn laid hasty hands upon it, and devoured it at the great table that stood handy for the purpose. Scant grace was theirs, small the preparations for the meal, and weak the response of a thankful heart when all was finished to the last crumb,

and still an unfortunate stomach craved for more. It might be possible to forget the lack-lustre faces, the weary looks, the soulless eyes of that little group of English-born savages. There was nothing horrible about them, nothing comic, nothing cheerful, nothing attractive. Among them there was one face, and only one, on which the eye would rest with pleasure. It was the face of a young girl of seventeen. She leaned against the table, and fixed her eyes hungrily upon a gaunt and pinched-up bloater on the gridiron, her supper. Her eyes! O painters of the ideal—painters of the sweet woman's face, look into the depths of those eyes, and transfer to the canvas, if you can, the limpid eternity of thought, feeling, passion, and hope apparent in that gaze! So live for ever. Her mouth is a very rosebud of a mouth; lips half parted and open show pearl-white teeth. Her features are cut clean and straight; her hair is thick and abundant. She wears it tied in a careless grace about her head. She is a goddess, whose every movement is a grace, and every thought a step heavenward. And, alas! it is all a lie to look at!

There are no thoughts in that head with the sweet and gracious curve, save thoughts that are bad and detestable. Those eyes, which were designed for a Sappho, belong to the commonest and most hopeless tramp. Her rosebud mouth is the passage of coarse words and rough execrations; her features are yet delicate, because she is so young, and they have not had time to grow thick with drink and debauchery. And yet the pity of it—oh! the pity of it. It seems, somehow, so natural that a thick-lipped, low-browed, coarse-featured creature should be a criminal and a drunkard, that we have no pity for him. It is only because by a wholesome instinct we associate goodness with beauty that we pity the tender and lovely girl standing yet, to appearance, on the brink of infamy, though in reality she has been steeped in it since the first day that she could understand what went on in the world around her. Turn from the pretty creature, and forget her. You had best, because you cannot help her. Look at her companion, Shallow Bob by name. He has been a pretended sailor, with a lying story of shipwreck and disaster, and is now,

like Myles Cuolahan, a pedlar and hawker. But, unlike his friendly rival, he is an ardent votary of Bacchus. That is the reason why his young wife has only a single red herring for her supper, and why Bob himself is asleep on the settle, with no supper at all but a skinful of beer. Bob, you see, is drunk. You might, I say again, forget the occupants of the room, its shape, its appearance, its situation. What you never could forget, if you had once experienced it, was the smell.

Myles knew it of old, and took no notice of it as he walked to the farther end, followed by Jack. Here, where the empty fireplace formed a natural centre, sat in a semicircle half a dozen gentlemen whose well-dressed appearance, as well as a certain haughtiness of carriage, proclaimed their superiority to the noisy troop at the other end. They were accommodated partly with settles and partly with wooden chairs, which bore signs of having seen rough usage. In the largest and most comfortable chair, the arms of which were yet unbroken, sat a man of apparently fifty years of age. His legs were crossed, and in one hand he nursed a pint pot containing

what Mr. Coger confidently called Sherry Wine. He was drinking it, rather ostentatiously, like beer. A cigar graced his lips, which were thin, shifty, and subject to nervous twitchings. His shaven cheek was pale ; his features were straight, regular, and even handsome ; the crow's-feet, carved like some delicate chasing, lay thickly about the corners of his eyes ; and these were quick, keen, and cruel. He was of middle height and thin ; dressed in a suit of black, with a white neck-cloth that might have served the most uncompromising of Baptist ministers ; and his hands, white and shapely, were furnished with fingers as slender and tapering as those of any girl. This gentleman's name, among his intimates, was Cardiff Jack, and he was so called, like a mediæval warrior, after the supposed place of his birth. Among those who only aspired to the honour of a partial acquaintance with him it was Mr. Cardiff, or Captain Cardiff. And it was significant of the greatness of his merits that the lower any lady or gentleman was sunk into the slough of habitual criminalism the more she or he honoured and respected

Captain Cardiff. Mr. Cardiff? Why, the man lived like a nobleman, eating and drinking the best. What the flesh craved for, Mr. Cardiff could give the flesh. He slept in feather-beds every night; he knew no casual wards; the hard labour of the treadmill had only occasionally been his lot during a run of at least twenty years; and there seemed no end or limit to the prosperity which attended all his ventures. So when Antonio borrowed that money of the Jew, his keels floated safely in the harbours, or sailed merrily before the wind. Fine weather may change. No man was ever safe from the strokes of fortune until they invented the three-percents; and even with these we may have to travel by railway, and so miserably perish; or we may have to sleep in a friend's house, and catch typhus from a drain; or we may have supper at a ball, and die the next day from the quassia which was in the beer, the sour gooseberry in the glass before the last saraband, or the fusel oil in the stirrup-cup. Mr. Cardiff, who spent his money as he got it, had not yet advanced to the three-percents, and so was exposed to every breeze of Fortune the mutable.

Opposite to him sat, side by side, on the settle, two gentlemen, one of advanced years, who were beaming upon each other with a benignity that spoke of mutual affection and trust, with that long separation from each other that is requisite—such is our fallen humanity—for the maintenance of perfect trust among friends. One, who “enjoyed the title,” as the Peerage says, of General—General Duckett, indeed—was a white-haired man, whose long flowing locks, coupled with a white beard, a pair of red eyes, a nose very much like those bottle-noses which any one over thirty can just remember—they have entirely disappeared now—and two thick, protruding lips, gave a combination of expressions very remarkable. Looked at in profile, he appeared benevolent, soft-hearted, gentle, though undoubtedly plain. Looked at from a three-quarter-face point of view, the nose, being foreshortened, lost, somehow, its benevolence, and you got the effect of both eyes. Then you began to think there might be another side to the character of this good old man. Seen full-face, with both those orbs upon you in all their Mars-like redness, their steady

fervour, you wondered if all virtue had left the world, since the mere turning of a face could make you feel cold and doubtful of its very existence. As for his companion, he was dressed in the garb of the Lusty Turk. A vast turban was wrapped round his head, the corners of which hung down in graceful plaits; his face, covered with an immense black beard, was of a deep chocolate brown, as were also his hands. A Syrian jacket, of embroidered scarlet cloth, was over a loose shirt or waistcoat of purple cloth, and the dress terminated in flowing Oriental trousers, falling in folds about his heels. He wore English boots. In his belt was stuck a dagger-knife, a brass ink-horn such as Syrians wear, and out of his pocket protruded the end of a voluminous roll.

Myles looked at him with surprise. He knew the other two, and nodded familiarly as he entered; but the third man he did not know. They all three roared with laughing. Myles, with no further ceremony, took the immense beard in his hand, and, to Jack's enormous surprise, removed it bodily. The face which it revealed was, like the part ex-

posed, of a deep brown; and Myles knew it now, and gave back the beard to the owner with a laugh in which the moralist would have missed the reproof that should have fallen.

"It's only Tom Lock," he said.

"Yussuf Ben Ibn Hassan Effendi, if you please," said Mr. Lock, putting back the beard very carefully. "Wallah! A poor Arabian Jew, persecuted for his faith, and now wandered to the shores of England, where alone he can hope to receive help from the charitable."

"He talks English too well," said Captain Cardiff.

"Yussuf is poor; Yussuf is pious. The rabbis have chased Yussuf from the synagogue. From earliest childhood Yussuf has studied English with the good missionaries. He knows it better than Arabic."

"A good deal better," said Mr. Cardiff.

"Bismillah! May I show your gracious Excellency my copy of the Hebrew Scriptures? Behold it!"

"Tom Lock, you are going it too strong," observed Myles.

"Not at all. I've been to the Levant; I knocked about among them for half a dozen years. I know all their little dodges, and I twig their lingo—at least, enough of it. The hind wheel of a carriage will pass where the fore wheel has passed. That's a Turkish proverb. Wallah!"

"Better do a day's work, Tom," said Myles the moral.

"Another Turkish proverb: To the lazy man every day is a holiday. Wallah!"

"And what are you doing up here, General?"

"I'm here for the good of my health, Mr. Cuolahan. There was a little unpleasantness about me and two or three of my dear, dear children; and they kept me a year and more in Maidstone while they looked into it. Was so pressing that I couldn't get away. Now I have got away, they have kept the kids, poor things, and I want one or two more. Them Reformatories cuts me up dreadful."

He fixed his unholy eyes on Jack, who looked uneasily at Myles.

"No, no, General!" he said good-naturedly; you don't get that boy. Your Kentish

Brigade must break up altogether if it can't get on without my Jack."

"Don't think, Mr. Cuolahan," said the Commander of the Brigade with pride—"do not think that I have to beg my boys of any one. Parents who know what's good for their children bring them to me, sir, I would have you to know, to be taught the Profession and made rich men of."

The Profession was the Art of Robbery in all its branches, the General being one of those enthusiasts who, without actually being in practice, devote their talents to "coaching" and instructing aspirants. In every branch of learning, in every mystery, there are such men. The Civil Service, the Army, the Church, have every avenue crowded with those whom, if the competitive-system people were logical, they would invite to the highest places, because they know most. The General had only lately, as he hinted to Myles, quitted Maidstone prison, where he had spent a twelvemonth in durance for receiving stolen goods, and was now in the North for the benefit of his health.

"I found Maidstone," he said, taking a sip

at the rum-and-water, "pleasant for a change; but I got tired of it. At my time of life the doctor, you see, always orders a ration of wine or spirits every day, so that I didn't altogether go without my whack, and there was no hard labour or me. As for the tobacco—well, after all, it does not matter much. You do get lonely sometimes at night, and away from the dear boys and all; but, Lord, regular hours is very good for an old man. And then you can reflect, as the Chaplain said."

"The fish comes to his senses after he is in the net. Turkish proverb—wallah!" said Yussuf Ibn Hassan Effendi.

"The Bible to read—well—well—there's good stories in the Bible, when you come to read them with understanding. Did you ever hear the story of Samson, Cardiff Jack?"

"Hang Samson—"

"No; don't swear at Samson—don't; because you might be sorry for it afterwards. And it's a good story. There was the makings of a very successful man about Samson, if only he'd had the advantages of my education. When Samson lost his bet, Cardiff—it was a rum bet, thirty sheets and thirty changes

of garments—I suppose they must have been in the slop trade, and it really seems a good deal: wuth—ah! if the garments wasn't only a little gone, they might be wuth a matter of five pound, take them in the lump . . . .”

“ Well, General, get on—get on. Samson lost his bets, and then he stepped it, I suppose. You don’t call *that* a dodge ? ”

“ Now, there’s your error, Cardiff. That’s what the common practitioner would have done. Any mean thief could step it. Do you hear, boys and girls ? ” He raised his voice, and addressed himself to the other end of the room. “ Anybody could step it. What did Samson do ? ” He looked round and whispered. “ Well; when you read the story you’ll see what Samson did when he lost. But he paid up all his bets like a gentleman, and nobody never suspected how he done it, so artful he done it.”

After delivering himself of this proof of the advantages of prison discipline and Biblical study, the General fell back in his settle.

“ Yes, I’d a very peaceful and quiet twelve months at Maidstone. It was a pleasure to gammon the Chaplain—he was that soft—

and the people was most civil and attentive—nobody more so. You see they all knows General Duckett, the head of the Kentish Brigade. ‘General,’ said one of the warders, ‘it does a man’s ‘art good to see you back here again in the old place. Eighty years of age, and half of ‘em spent in quod, and quite the gentleman still. I calls you, General, a credit to the country.’ It’s very flatterin’, that kind of thing, Myles, and friends all; and I do hope”—his voice grew a little tremulous—“that when you are as old as me, you will have the same respect used, and find the same good feeling, in whatever jug you gets to. The worst of it was the disorder the Brigade fell into. Mostly broken up and scattered—my dear boys. Some of them promising lads, too.”

He turned to his friend the Oriental, on his right, and began to smile upon him.

“My own boy,” he murmured, waving his hand at Yussuf Ibn Hassan; “my boy—I made him what he is.”

“Who is the kid, Myles?” asked Mr. Cardiff.

Myles explained, briefly, that Jack was his

pal, disdaining any statement of the circumstances that had led to their connection.

"He seems a nice boy," said the other, looking at him much as General Duckett had done.

"Yes, Jack's a good boy. What's more," continued Mylés, "he's going to be a good boy, Jack Cardiff."

"Ay, ay; so I suppose. Well, good boys are scarce. I never was a good boy, for my own part."

The noise of plates and chattering at the other end of the room had by this time subsided, most of the people having taken their supper and gone off to bed or to somewhere else. Only the unfortunate Bob was left, still sleeping off the effects of the beer, and with him the girl, sitting at his side with feminine patience, waiting till her lord should waken. So sat Jael the Kenite, till the thought came into her head to get that hammer and the nail, and finish off her guest at one blow.

"I never was a good boy," Mr. Cardiff repeated, looking round, and seeing that they were alone. "I was a bad boy from the beginning."

Myles looked at him in amazement. Was Cardiff Jack, after all, going to repent his ways?

"I was a gentleman, Myles, though you wouldn't think it now."

"Why not?" asked Myles persuasively.  
"Shure the coat you wear—~~do~~—"

"The coat, man!" returned the other impatiently. "I was just such another boy to look at as that little devil there. The same curly hair—and—what does it matter, eh?"

He finished his pint of sherry at a single draught, and laughed.

"I once read in a book that there is sure to be a scapegrace in every family. As, you see, I was very fond of all my brothers and sisters, and most careful of the family honour, I was anxious to avert this calamity from the rest of them by any means possible. After a good deal of thought, I hit upon the only plan which seemed to me quite sure of success. I resolved upon becoming the family scapegrace myself. I was expelled from school. I went to an army coach, and was expelled by him, though *he* needn't have been so nasty particular; and then I got my commission. By Gad!

Myles, I've had the Queen's commission, and worn the scarlet. Somehow I didn't get time to sow the wild oats before I was exp—— I mean I had to resign my commission. And then my family would do no more for me. Fancy, Myles, after all my sacrifices for their sake ; after becoming the bad hat of the whole lot, setting the awful example for them to avoid, my brothers and sisters declined to do anything for me ! My father cut me out of his will, and so I became—what you know me —Jack Cardiff, the begging-letter writer.”

“ More's the pity,” said Myles ; “ when you might have got your licence and hawked a respectable swag about a good beat.”

“ Trade,” said the other—“ trade, Myles ; all very well for you, who know no better, but I could not degrade myself and my belongings by taking up trade.”

“ It is degrading,” remarked Myles, “ to get an honest living, isn't it ? ”

The Arabian Jew opened his mouth to speak.

“ Now, don't you say ‘ Wallah,’ Tom Lock,” said Mr. Cardiff, “ or I'll chuck the tumbler at your head. Shut up.”

"There is a Turkish proverb," returned Yussuf Ibn Hassan, "which says, To hold your tongue is peace. Wallah!"

"It is all he knows," said Mr. Cardiff; "half a dozen Turkish proverbs and a turban. Lord! Lord! what fools some people be!"

"I'm working my way to Bath, where there's a dear old maiden lady, a vessel very precious to all good Christian people, who takes an interest in Arabian Jews, especially if they're converts. I'm going to stay with her. Let's see, Mr. Cardiff, whether your twenty tricks are going to be better than my one."

Here little Jack, who had been nodding for some time, fairly fell off the settle, and came with a bump on the ground.

"Come, Jack," cried Myles, "we'll go to bed"—and carried him off.

"'Tis the first day he came with me," he said, looking at the innocent boy gone fast asleep the moment he lay down in bed. "The first day, and I bring him here, of all places in the world! Why, Lord forgive us, if I let him stay here for a week, General Duckett would have him in his Kentish Brigade, stealing pewter pots from the public-houses, and

towels from the hedges. And Tom Lock would dress him up like an Arabian Jew, and take him off to Bath to lie and steal from the old fool there. And Cardiff Jack would make him his bonnet to help *him* to lie and steal. Myles, ye must be a hardened sinner yerself, you and your temperance pledge and all, to bring the child to a house like this. Never again, Jack, never again. We'll sleep in the barns, and under the hedges, if we can't get into decent publics ; never again."

And then Myles, taking the precaution to put the chair against the lock of the door and to tie his purse round his waist, got into bed himself and fell asleep.

Next morning he awoke at seven. Jack, his face upon his arm, was still sleeping soundly. Myles dressed noiselessly, and, taking his pack, descended the stairs. He left word at the bar that the boy was to be undisturbed till he returned, drank his coffee, and went out.

Between nine and ten Jack, too, awoke, wondering where he was. Finding Myles gone he dressed quickly and went downstairs.

In the bar was Mr. Cardiff, perusing a paper he had just finished writing. General Duckett was there, too, taking his "morning." He held the doctrine that it mattered little how much you drank, provided you took it on a full stomach, and at regular stated hours. Acting on this theory, he breakfasted regularly at eight, and "took" something once every hour, and in the evening twice, for the rest of the day. At a certain hour his pulse began to quicken. Later on, his energies and imagination were in full play. Quite late, and just before he went to bed, his legs began to tie themselves in knots, and his speech grew thick. We left him last night just before this stage was reached. The Arabian Israelite was already gone, not by the road, but by public conveyance—a third-class railway carriage—to a certain village he knew of, on the way to Bath, where there was a learned clergyman who took great interest in the conversion of Jews.

The rest of the company had all dispersed.

"Hallo! here's Myles's boy," cried Cardiff Jack. "Hanged if he hasn't turned up on purpose. Where's Myles, my chap?"

"Mr. Cuolahan's gone into the town," said the barman, "with his swag. And the boy's to have a cup o' coffee and as much bread-and-butter as he can eat, and a egg. And he's to wait here till Myles comes home."

"What was I a-saying of?" drivelled the General, now in the first or awakening stage of his daily faculties. "What was I agoing to say?"

Mr. Cardiff was regarding little Jack with a reflective air.

"I know what I was agoing to say. Cardiff Jack, when I was in Portland——"

"Oh! d—n Portland!"

"When I was in Portland—I didn't like it at all. Maidstone is quite a pleasant jug, and they sing beautiful hymns in the chapel of a Sunday—but when I was in Portland, working in the hospital, I made the acquaintance of a very pleasant gentleman—a very pleasant gentleman indeed he was. I dare say you've heard tell of him, Cardiff; he's Mr. Inspector Mahaffy, the detective."

Cardiff caught little Jack by the arm and hurried him out of the place, leaving a parting execration for the General.

"Now, that's unkind of Cardiff Jack," murmured the good old man, "because I could have told him, if he'd only waited two minutes for me to collect my thoughts, that Mr. Inspector Mahaffy is in this very identical town. I saw him yesterday. And he's up to no good, though he is a affable sort."

"Did he say owt to ye?" asked the pot-boy.

"We exchanged the compliments of the season," replied the General grandly; "but I don't want Mr. Mahaffy asking questions, and so I'm off by the first train that goes. And if I was Cardiff Jack I'd be off, too. Ah! if I could only get that purty boy, that purty, curly, mealy faced, up-and-down little fat-legged cherubim of a boy, with a face like a angel for sweetness, there would be no brighter ornament for poor old General Duckett on all the road—no, nor a smarter lad in the Kentish Brigade. But it can't be—it can't be—and I must do without him."

He sighed, and took another glass of the reviver.

Outside, the wary Cardiff drew the boy gently round the corner, where there was a

sort of blind alley and a stable. He sat down on the shafts of a cart, and put the child in front of him.

"Let me look at you, boy; straight in the face—so. Let me look at your hands. Good—white and soft. Do you see this letter? Good again. Now, you've just got to do exactly what I tell you, no more and no less. There was a boy once did more than I told him. I cut him to pieces. D'ye hear?—I cut him to pieces."

The man's eyes, as he hissed out his words in a fierce whisper, were as fierce as any wild cat's. Jack looked up and down for Myles, but he was away up town with his pack, buying and selling.

"Take that letter and read it. You can read?"

Jack read—

"SIR,

"I am the correspondent who has requested you to receive intelligence of a startling character. I must first say that you are invited to make any scrutiny possible into my character. I am a gentleman, formerly

one of the most intimate friends and acquaintances of your late lamented brother, Captain Charles —, of the — Regiment. I was with him when, in the year 18—, he made that tour in the United States and Canada, from which he never returned. I joined him in Toronto, left him on his marriage in Baltimore, and was with him again at the birth of his son. I am aware that the family supposed him to have perished unmarried at the foundering of the *Royal Prince*. He did die, but he left a son, now a boy, brought up as a gentleman, but in ignorance of his paternity, and quite destitute of any means. He is *now the same age and has much the same appearance* as the youthful bearer of this letter. I am the only person who possesses proofs of the existence of this son, and of the marriage of your brother. The boy is therefore the rightful owner of the lands you now hold. I am, sir, a gentleman, once in the army. Ill-health obliged me to sell out. Although it is my duty to give you this information, I can feel for those who, in the peaceful enjoyment of an ample estate, have suddenly to contemplate the en-

tire annihilation of their income. Yours was inherited by you in the belief that your brother died childless. But stern necessity obliges me, not only in my own interests, but also in those of my unfortunate ward, to ask some small assistance from your ample means. Secure to me, by any arrangement you may wish to make, the future subsistence of the boy, and you will be unmolested. Deny this, and I proceed to the nearest lawyer's, to place my papers in his hands. After which, of course, the law will decide the matter. You will understand, sir, that you have to do with a gentleman who, out of regard to the memory of his dead and gallant friend, wishes to smooth matters over.

“I remain, dear Sir,

“Yours faithfully,

“CLAUDE HAMILTON PRENDERGAST,

“Captain.

“P.S.—I can give you one hour for consideration. The bearer will bring back with him, solely as a guarantee of good faith, the small advance of five pounds.”

Jack read it—it was written in a most

beautiful and clerkly hand—spelling out the hard words with great care, and understanding nothing at all about it.

"Now, boy, Myles Cuolahan left a message for you. He said, 'Tell Jack he's to do all that Captain Prendergast—do you catch the name?—Prendergast—tells you to do, and then to wait till I come back. Perhaps the good captain will take you away for a spell with him.' Do you understand?"

Jack shook his head. Not one bit did he understand.

"Now, then, take the letter in your hand. Here, take off that red rag round your neck, and try to look a little more like a gentleman's son. So. Follow me. When you see me stop before a door and look round, you come up and knock at the door. Then you leave the letter and wait. If they ask you who sent the letter, you say Captain Prendergast. If they ask you where he is, you say you are not to tell. And when you have got an answer, get quick outside the door, and dodge round the corner. Then you hurry back to me; and if you lose the money, I'll skin you alive. If they come out after you,

keep dodging about, but don't come back here."

Jack took the letter, and followed his adviser for a street or two. Suddenly Mr. Cardiff turned back.

"Who sent the letter, boy?"

"Captain Prendergast."

"Good. Where does he live?"

"I'm not to tell."

"Good."

Then they went up street after street till they came to a great old-fashioned house standing well back from the road, with gardens stretching back behind it, a place that looked what it was—the town residence of a county family before any family went up to London. Mr. Cardiff nodded his head, crossed over, and passed on. Jack entered boldly, rang the bell, and waited. A footman in livery opened the door, and took his letter, leaving him waiting in the hall. Presently there was a buzz of voices as another door opened and shut, and the footman came back and beckoned Jack to follow him.

A breakfast-room: a lady making tea, and two gentlemen, one of whom was a precise,

middle-aged man dressed in black, who looked like what he really was—a lawyer. At the table stood a third man, a great heavy-looking man, who held his hat in his hand, and was reading, Jack thought very oddly, Captain Prendergast's letter.

“What a pretty boy!” cried the lady. “Is it possible——”

“My dear lady,” said the lawyer, “pray—pray allow me. Boy,” he began, in an awful voice, “what is your name?”

“Jack Armstrong, sir.”

“And you live?”

“I walk about with Myles Cuolahan, who carries a pack.”

“You were not with him three months ago,” said the big man.

“No; I was at Mr. Bastable’s, at Shoffield.”

“A pretty story, indeed,” said the lawyer. “Now, Mr. Inspector Mahaffy——”

“Beg your pardon, sir,” said the policeman, “but I think there’s a deeper plant. Myles Cuolahan is a very honest fellow, and the boy is new to it. Who did you leave in the street, my boy?”

“Cardiff Jack.”

You see, the question expected by the letter-writer was not asked, and the boy naturally told the exact truth.

Mr. Mahaffy started. Here was candour.

"Cardiff Jack told me that Captain Prendergast sent the letter. I am not to tell where Captain Prendergast lives." Jack volunteered this information with the calmness of innocence.

"Ah! And where might Cardiff Jack be?"

"He is staying at the Grapes Inn, where we two slept last night—Myles and me."

"And where is Myles Cuolahan?" asked Mahaffy. "Does he know that you have got the letter?"

"He is gone up town to sell his things. Please, I must get back, if you'll give me the answer. Cardiff Jack said that Myles said that I was to take Captain Prendergast's letter."

"The boy, ma'am," said Mr. Mahaffy, "is as innocent as your ladyship. And Cardiff Jack is the biggest rogue in the three kingdoms. Twenty years' run he's had of it, barring a little spell in Millbank. But we've got him now. After all, it's only a six months' business. Lucky for us that the boy is innocent, and

let everything out. And now, sir, I hope you won't be under no more alarm about these letters. Lord bless you ! Cardiff Jack knows all the family histories of half a dozen counties, and could pitch a letter into any one of 'em as would astonish them like a Prooshan bomb-shell. Lord ! Lord ! to think how people will be frightened by a clumsy jemmy like that. A good trick, too, to send the very identical heir to the property for you to look at. Kind of invitation for you to make cold meat on him at once. Beg your ladyship's pardon. When I get on the subject of the Captain, my tongue regular runs away with me. Please keep the boy for a bit, while I slip out at the back and effects the capture. It won't take above half an hour. He might have a bit o' breakfast. Don't your ladyship have no more fear. And as for that boy—I know boys—and he's as innocent as any sucking dove."

At twelve o'clock Myles returned from his business with a lighter pack and a heavier pocket. He noticed some agitation in the neighbourhood of the Grapes, but thought nothing of it till he entered the bar of the hostelry, and was confronted by the landlord.

"Well, Mr. Cuolahan, this is a good day's work, this is."

"What is it at all?" asked Myles.

"Here's Mr. Cardiff, the biggest gentleman on the road, marched off to gaol; here's my house insulted; here's your little devil of a cub gone and peached on the Captain; and I'll thank you to take your d——d teetotal, temperance preachin', sneakin' boy and yourself off as quick as you like."

"Where's Jack?"

"If you mean Mr. Cardiff, he's in quod; and if you mean your little devil, he's locked up upstairs."

Myles calmly mounted the stairs, unlocked the door, and brought out his prisoner. Then he went down again, and invited the landlord to step outside and take a few rounds in adjustment of the quarrel. This being refused, on the ground of conscientious scruples against the ordeal by battle, Myles permitted himself to fall into undignified wrath, and politely offered to fight any man among the lot, whose personal gallantry he impugned, and finally marched off flourishing his stick, and cracking scornful fingers in the eyes of the bystanders.

In front of the police station was Mr. Mahaffy, who shook his head sorrowfully.

"Myles Cuolahan, I didn't think you'd have done it."

"I didn't do it," said Myles.

"You did, Myles. It was all your fault. What be you taking a boy like that to the Grapes for? And what do you expect will be the end of him, and of you too, if he goes on associating with that lot? Why, General Duckett was there last night, and Shallow Bob, and Tom Lock, as well as Cardiff Jack. For shame, Myles! for shame!"

Myles hung his head, and went on his way, speaking nothing for a mile or two. Then he pulled himself together, chanted a stave or two, and then he clapped the boy on the shoulder.

"Never again, Jack, my boy—never again."

But the mischief was done, and Captain Cardiff, in dungeon vile, was vowing vengeance against the boy.

## CHAPTER IX.

OUT of the town, and on the tramp. Jack Armstrong looks back to that nine months, now twenty years behind him, with that feeling which makes us dwell upon certain portions of our lives till they lengthen out, and assume dimensions in the memory out of all proportion with their length. As some men love to recall every incident of their undergraduate career, the day they were proctorised, the day they were upset driving tandem, the day they did *not* get their First, and all the rest of the important nothings—so Jack and Myles talk still over their six months' companionship, when they tramped up and down, and tired not of each other, through the leafy lanes of England. They have forgotten the days when it rained, the days when it was too hot or too cold, the long

road which seemed to the boy as if it would never have an end; the discomfort of the nights when—for Myles kept his word, and never again took the lad to a tramps' house—they slept in barns on straw, or on a wooden bench in some cottage that could give them no other accommodation. It was a pleasant, careless time for man and boy. Their way lay chiefly off the high-roads, often across fields, or along lanes, which in summer were bright with foxglove and meadowsweet, or in autumn were rich with filberts and blackberries. If the weather was fine, they sat under the hedge for their dinner. They lived well, because Myles drove a good trade. They drank coffee, when they could get it; milk, when that could be bought; water, when both failed. Myles knew all the cottagers and their wives. He was always in good temper. He sang; talked, and told stories to beguile the way; and he even tried to improve his own and the boy's mind by reading aloud from the geography book. Thus, after dinner, instead of a siesta, they would read how the kingdom of Siam was bordered on the north, and what were its principal towns. Then there were the

tramps to meet. Myles knew them nearly all, from the gipsy to the barrel-organ man, and could talk their tongues, from Rommany to thieves' slang. Once it was an Italian, labouring heavily along with his grinding instrument. Him Myles accosted with a shout.

"Sit down, man, and have a bite with us. I remember you. I seen you at Pietro Corti's —you savey, Corti. That's where it was. Sticking his knife, he was, Jack, into another grinder, when I seen him last."

Jack looked with curiosity on a fellow-creature who had gone near to murder some one. There was a cool deliberation, too, about the way in which Myles conveyed the information.

The man sat down and broke bread. Presently he rose, laughed his thanks, and went on his way.

"Union Court, Saffron Hill—that's where Pietro Corti lives. The organ-men meet there every night, and fight over their wine. They didn't drink beer—not they. Day-time, the house is full of tin-plate makers. They drink rum."

Jack got a little confused between rum-

drinking tin-plate makers and Italians who slowly stick knives into each other.

When the geography book was finished, Myles bought a work on English history, promising Jack grand tales when they should get to the deeds of the Saxons in Ireland.

It was a great disappointment. There were none. Not a line about Cromwell at Drogheda—nothing on the spoliation of the land—more extraordinary still, not a word about Myles's own ancestors, the kings of Connaught.

"And me, Jack," he said, "a king meself, if everybody had his rights, barring the O'Gormans that lives by Lough Derg, on their own land, though Lord Enniskillen calls it his, and the MacSwires of Pettigo, where my own eldest brother was bound to a shoemaker."

"The son of a king is a prince," observed Jack. "Are you a prince, Myles?"

"Bedad, Jack, there's many a prince isn't a better man than me. And I'd fight any prince that's going, left-handed, I would, and be honoured entirely if he beat me."

Jack's notions of royalty became confused, and a prince was henceforth irrevocably associated in his mind with a flat box full of

"swag" and the temperance pledge. It must be confessed that, years afterwards, when he first saw the Prince of Wales, it was a shock to observe that, so far from carrying a pedlar's pack, his Royal Highness was attired as an ordinary English gentleman.

"They've got," whispered Myles, looking round to see that no one was within a mile or two—"they've got the very sword that we used to fight with before I was born. It lies under the thatch to the left of the mud chimney as ye go into my grandfather's cottage. I saw it once, when I was your age, Jack. It was on our way to Belfast that my father took us. All the neighbours came in, and there was many a *cead' mille failthe*, I can tell you, when they saw us. He sat, the ould man, on a cushion, and the rest of us on stone benches, I remember. There was bacon and the strings of onions hanging over his head, and the supper cooking in a pot. Such a supper, Jack!—potatoes and bacon, *meschauns* and butter, oat bread and noggins of milk. And after that the whisky punch, while he pulled down the sword from the thatch, and we sang the Irish songs and

told stories of our own great days, before any of us was born nor heard of."

Jack began to wonder what would happen if the English succeeded in finding the sword. Myles went on, his blood roused by the memories of his childhood, pouring out stories of the Irish peasantry, to which he belonged by birth, their superstitions, their pride, and their prejudices. But none of this was intelligible to little Jack, who retained only a confused dream of English cruelty and Irish virtue, with a glow of shame that he should belong by birth to the race of the oppressors.

Strange and various were the acquaintances who saluted Myles upon the road. The commonest was the slouching tramp. He, as one beneath the pedlar's social grade, only touched his hat as he passed, with a "Fine day, Mister Cuolahan." For him, too, Myles had a word of friendly recognition, and a conversation would ensue in the argot of the road, which some mistake for Gipsy. The honest pedlar knew this as well as the nobler tongue; but it was Greek to the boy. The tramp was always down on his luck, and was for ever complaining. "I went," he would

say mournfully, feeling an empty pocket, "I went to the back jigger myself, and did the patter, because the ken was dead to Cockney Fred, my pal; as for the mot, it's shin: the slavey's been always good for a kant, and the cove for a bob; but, Lord love you, the cove wasn't at home, and the slavey'd been changed, and the ken was coopered—and not a thing hanging about anywheres within reach."

By some instinct the boy knew well enough that he was listening to one who was liar, thief, and common malingering skulk by profession, though Myles was too kind to mention the little circumstance.

The road people of those days got their living in various ways. All of them knew a trade, though they were loth to exercise it when begging would fill their stomachs with far less trouble. They could make ladders, flower-stands, nets, and all sorts of tin smithery. But, by their sharp and shifty eyes, by their involuntary and frequent pauses in their work, and by a peculiar slouch in their walk, which spoke of a hole-and-corner life, and a disinclination to be recognized, you might recognize the tramp. A few there were,

but these chiefly confined to the great towns and the highroads, who pretended to no trade at all. One old man, for instance, was once pointed out to Jack by Myles as a person of the highest distinction ; "for," said he, "he invented the routers." Seeing the boy unmoved by the information, he went on to explain how, before the Poor Law Act, the Irish who became chargeable on the parish used to be sent on to Ireland by way of Bristol, receiving three-halfpence a mile and free lodgings. The venerable patriarch before them was the inventor of a system of perpetual motion, by which the Irish paupers returned to England by the next boat after landing in Dublin, begged their way back to London, and so got sent on again, and so on, *de capo*, the whole forming a life of novelty, freshness, and continual change, coupled with freedom from anxiety, and endless opportunities for improving the mind. The passing of the New Act put an end to this system, and condemned these poor people to settle down. So, in the Middle Ages, it was an endless delight to go on pilgrimage. You left your wife and family, your debts and your duns,

your duties and your dangers ; you wandered pleasantly from convent to convent, always meeting with clean straw for a bed, a hot supper, and a breakfast. And when you returned home, after pious years of prayer, you found the squalling babies grown up—having been fed by the monks—and able to work for you, your debts forgotten, your duns dead. Then the Christian Hajj, in the odour of sanctity, passed the rest of his days in idleness and glory. The good time was stopped by bulls and rescripts from Pope and bishops, and the pious peasant was fain to stay at home, work off his liabilities in the sweat of his brow, and put bread into the mouths of the children.

Besides the tramps, the roads were occupied, so to speak, by the ladies and gentlemen who live by trading on the credulity of the populace. Such were the "crocuses," who lived by the sale of pills and drugs—a pestilent tribe. Their head and captain was Manchester Joe, a chieftain who, had he been able to read and write, might have risen to eminence. But the race of crocuses was even then almost extinct. With them marched

the “Charley-pitchers,” who gained an honourable livelihood with the thimble and the pea—a game now also fallen into decay. This tribe worked in pairs, one being the “Button,” that is, the confederate who egged on the flats; and Myles once pointed out to Jack the gentleman who was reckoned the very best button in all England. He bore the garb and the appearance of a Methodist clergyman, but with more external meekness. Dressed in black, with a large white tie, he would slowly pass by the Charley-pitcher with an air of meditation, as if he were thinking out his next sermon. Being surprised into looking on at the game, he would laugh at its simplicity, and then, remarking to the bystanders, as if he were in some doubt, that there could be no real religious harm in taking money from fellows so foolish, would bet and win. Ladies generally accompanied these professionals, their share of the work being to pick the pockets of yokels. Like the Sirens, they first bewitched their prey. After twenty years of road-life, Myles Cuolahan regarded these tramps a good deal from their own point of view. He was not above sitting at meat with

them, as we have seen, and would talk familiarly with them. Moreover, he admired success, even that of a common wayside cheat, and conceded the palm of honour to lawless audacity as readily as to virtue. With such men, Claude Duval is a hero, and Robin Hood a demigod.

All this, however, belonged to the old habits, when poor Biddy tramped after him along the road, and he fought, drank, and flourished with the rest. For Jack's sake he changed his companions ; for Jack's sake and the sake of the little Norah. Should the girl, now being brought up a lady, ever have to blush for Jack, the friend of her infancy ?

But what was he to do with the boy ? He put it to him as a problem demanding his most serious consideration. Jack could arrive at no conclusion.

" All thim people we meet on the road, Jack, is thieves and gonephs. You've got to make yourself a gentleman—Lord knows how ! "

Somehow, Jack felt that it would not do to turn tramp, or even to take out a pedlar's

licence. There were nobler ambitions. Every other line of life, as he saw it in the little country towns and villages, seemed full of interest. He would be a blacksmith, swinging a heavy hammer on the resounding anvil amid the sparks ; he would be a wheelwright, a carpenter—always a maker, hammerer, and forger of something, for the life of inaction had no charms for him. Once, for the first time in his life, he saw a regiment of soldiers marching with flying colours and playing band. Myles pricked up his ears, threw back his shoulders, straightened his back, and shouldered his staff. So did Jack ; and the pair marched on, man and boy, in military step and with beating pulse, till the music passed by and the soldiers were out of sight.

“I’ll be a soldier, Myles,” said Jack.

“So you shall,” cried Myles, his cheeks aglow. “So you shall. Bedad ! it’s a fine thing to be a soldier. I’ll give ye the ould sword in my grandfather’s thatch, and you shall carry it with the green flag in the other hand. I was drilled meself once, Jack. ’Twas in the Repale days. We used to turn out a hundred strong and be drilled in the cowld

under the moon; but we had no band of inusic. If Ireland wants to fight as well as to talk, she'll get the music first."

And once they were at a little seaside town, where were a few small craft in the coast trade. Jack saw the men heaving the anchor with their sailors' song, and watched the sails drop and the vessels slip away out to sea, and be lost in the mist. Presently he clutched Myles by the hand, "Myles, I'll be a sailor."

But how he was to be anything except what he was, the uneducated companion of an un-educated pedlar, by what ladder he was to mount to the higher world, he neither knew nor cared. Nor did Myles. To have the boy with him, some one to talk with, some one to pour out his thoughts to, some one to think of, lightened his days, and kept him out of temptation. Moreover, for a sense of responsibility leads one to reflect, he began to instruct Jack in a system of moral philosophy. All philosophy, like geometry, rests on a few axioms and definitions. Myles, having laid down his definitions, proceeded to build his edifice, and the Irishman being as logical a creature as the Frenchman, he began to erect

a superstructure which might have led to very singular results in Jack's after-life but for certain events which changed their fashion of life altogether.

## CHAPTER X.

IT was a warm, soft afternoon in August that Myles and Jack were toiling slowly over the downs which rise up from the seashore in the neighbourhood of Esbrough, whither Myles was going to show Jack his native place. The villages are thinly scattered among these hills, and the byroads connecting them are sometimes intricate and difficult to find. They had lost their way, as there was no sign-post in sight, no house, village, farm, nor church anywhere near. They were tired, hungry, and thirsty. Presently Jack put his hand in Myles's. It was his sign of utter breakdown, and Myles, stopping, saw the boy's knees trembling as he stood, and the tears of pain standing in his eyes.

“What’s to do, old chap?” he said.  
“Can’t you hold out to the top of the hill?”

"I'm so tired, Myles, and so thirsty. Let us sit down."

"Climb up on my back," said Myles.

He took up the boy as Sinbad took up his selfish old man, and went on again. The hill-top reached, another weary expanse of road stretched before them. Without a word Myles trudged on, though the boy was heavy and the pack was full.

The boy grew heavier every moment, the Irishman's throat became more parched, and he was beginning to think of sitting down himself, when he suddenly came, in a drop of the road, upon a solitary house. Not a lonely looking house, because it stood behind a clean-trimmed lawn, with flowers and creepers and trees about it, and with a plantation of firs on either side. A house of some stateliness, not belonging to a rich man, but to some one who could afford at least the luxury of a garden. Myles stopped, set down the boy, and looked over the hedge.

"Now, Jack, we shall get a drink of water, and we can ask our way."

On the lawn in front of the house was walking, his hands behind his back, an elderly

clergyman, with gray hair, gold spectacles, and kindly face. On a garden table lay a great book, the biggest book that Jack had ever seen. He looked up when he heard the heels upon his gravel.

Myles touched his hat respectfully.

"I do not want to buy anything, my good man," said the clergyman.

"I do not want to sell anything, sir," said Myles, "begging your reverence's pardon. We've walked a long way, and my boy's very tired. Will you give him a glass of water?"

"Surely—surely. Let me look at the boy. Why—why—sit down, my child, sit down."

Jack made an attempt to move; but he was too footsore and lame. Myles lifted him into the chair pointed at by his host, who called his housekeeper. A good-looking, portly woman of forty came at his summons, and Jack was presently carried away to the kitchen, where a draught of milk revived him.

"'Tis the blessed stuff," said Myles. "Maybe, ma'am, there's a little left of it still."

She brought a jug full, holding about a pint

and a half. He took a mighty pull, and set down the vessel empty.

Meantime the housekeeper was attending to the boy.

"He can't walk any further to-day," she said to her master. "He's dead beat; and it's ten miles along the road to Esbrough."

"Ten miles; so it is—ten miles. Well, Mrs. Prosser, we must do the best we can for them. They can stay here to-night if they will."

"The man might go on," said the housekeeper, suspiciously.

"It is six o'clock now," said her master. "Nonsense, Mrs. Prosser. You can give him the room over the stables. Take off the boy's shoes and stockings, and make Mary wash his feet."

"Shure, ye're a kind-hearted man," said Myles.

After dinner the clergyman sent word that he would like to see the boy. Jack was sent up to him, and Myles remained downstairs, where he had already worked his way through five or six pounds of cold beef, and was now ingratiating himself with the housekeeper.

"Would you like a cup of tea, Mr. Cuolahan?" asked Mrs. Prosser.

"Would I like a cup o' tay, ma'am? Would I like forty cups o' tay, av it's poured out by yourself!"

"Are you a married man, Mr. Cuolahan?"

"A widower, ma'am—a poor, disconsolate widower."

"With only that boy?"

"That boy, ma'am, is little Jack Armstrong, not my boy at all. His father was a gentleman. And I've got one little girl now living with Miss Ferens at Bedesbury. Only a widower, ma'am."

Mrs. Prosser sighed.

"My first, ma'am, was something in your style," Myles went on. "Full, ripe, and comfortable. But not so—not so much so, ma'am. In a humbler way. Ah, Mrs. Prosser! when the Lord made you he turned out the raal iligant article."

"Mr. Cuolahan! I'm ashamed of you, talking in that profane way. And master a clergyman and all."

"It's gratitude, Mrs. Prosser; it's gratitude——"

How far the conversation might have gone it is difficult to conjecture ; it was interrupted by an announcement from Mary, the maid, that the master wanted to speak to the boy's father.

" And that's me, I suppose," said Myles, rising. " Not that it's true ; and his poor mother, that's dead and gone, wouldn't have liked it said."

The clergyman was sitting in his study, crammed and piled with books. A small fire burned in the hearth, although it was a warm evening, and a lamp with a green shade was on the table. He was leaning his head on his hands, looking at Jack, sound asleep on the sofa before him.

" Come in, my man. Come in, and let us talk. Tell me about yourself."

Myles gave such information as he thought might be of interest.

" Then he is not your own son, after all ? " His eyes brightened as he turned sharply on Myles. " Tell me, my friend, could you give the boy up if you knew he would be educated in a God-fearing way ? "

Myles hesitated.

" You cannot think of dragging the boy about the country to learn your wretched life."

Myles fired up.

" Wretched life, is it ? Wretched life—with a trade that brings me in sometimes four pounds a week. Why, there isn't a man on the road that doesn't invy me. Mine a wretched life ? Your reverence"—he stepped forward and laid the forefinger of his gigantic hand on the table—" I know a life more wretched."

" I beg your pardon. I did not mean——"

" I know a life more wretched. I've heard tell of boys brought up at Eton, sent to Oxford College, and taught all that books could tache, filled wid ivery taste that money and education could give, and craving for the society of scholars like thimselves, and then sent down to a little country parish, with the nearest town ten miles away, and no neighbours and no scholars at all, to eat out their hearts preaching to rustics, reading books for iver and iver, with no aim nor no object, in just such a study as this, and just such a place as this. That's a more wretched life than mine."

The Rector started and winced. Then he waited for a few moments.

"I am answered," he said. "The life of every man who does work in the world is more happy than mine. I am answered."

Myles was silent. He had fired his shot.

"I was married once. Won't you sit down?" His tone unconsciously changed towards the man who could tell him the truth.

"Take a chair, Mr.—Mr. Cuolahan, thank you. I was married once—many years ago—and I lost my wife and my boy. I can speak of it now without the grief that used to tear me to pieces. He was such a boy as that: not so strong, poor child! with as bright a face, eyes as clear, and voice as sweet. Give me the boy."

"I cannot," said Myles. "Come, Jack, wake up. You must go to bed."

He could not wake the lad, and so took him in his arms. Between them the two men undressed the lad and laid him in a bed hung with rose-coloured curtains and in sheets perfumed with lavender. The old man bent over the boy as he slept, and kissed his cheek.

"Such a one might have been my son—nay, my grandson."

Myles was up and about at six, talking to the groom and chatting with the maids, who were comely. There was an air of order and comfort about the Rectory that soothed his spirit, and he began to think that, after all, life in a garden like this, well clothed, well fed, calm, might not be so miserable as his fancy pictured it.

At nine the clergyman came out upon the lawn, bringing with him the boy, a little abashed at being the object of so much attention.

Myles made his finest bow.

"I wish your riverence the best o' good mornings," he said. "Now, Jack, if you are ready, thank the gentleman in a proper manner and come along."

"Let him have his breakfast first," said Mr. Fortescue. "Mr. Cuolahan, I have been thinking that I spoke inconsiderately last night."

"Is it about the boy?" asked Myles. "There's no harm done, for I couldn't let Jack go."

"It is not about the boy. It is what I said of your own life. I am sincerely sorry."

Myles laughed.

"Shure it's meself that ought to be sorry. Your riverence's life is a beautiful life. Here you sit among the roses, and it's quiet and undisturbed. The old dial there in the sun couldn't have a quieter time. And here you read the beautiful old books. I'd give a thousand pound this minute if I could read the Latin like your riverence; and Hebrew, too, I'll swear. A lovely life!"

"Nay, it wants work and excitement. You, on the other hand, wandering about the country, study the great book of human nature."

"If 'tis a book," said Myles simply, "we haven't bought it yet. Jack and I have only just finished the History of England; and not a word of the kings of Connaught."

"Promise me one thing, Mr. Cuolahan," said the Rector. "If you think, on reflection, that it will be well for the boy to be educated—better, I mean, than leading your own exciting and interesting life of—of—adventure, bring him to me, and I will take care of him."

"I will, sir," said Myles, "and thank you very kindly."

"Would you like to stay there altogether, Jack?" he asked, when they were on the road again.

"I don't know," said Jack. "The gentleman came to me in bed this morning, Myles, and said I was his own grandson. See, he gave me this, and told me to keep it."

It was a pocket-book of leather. In it a card, with the name of the donor, and his address.

At the top of the hill they looked back. At the garden-gate still stood the old gentleman, looking sadly after them.

"A good sort," said Myles—"a good sort; and I'm sorry I spoke harsh last night. Jack, there's some people that the Lord picks out for reasons of His own. You and I have got to work for our bread. These people don't. They sit in the sunshine all their lives, and do nothing but what they like. After all, 'tis the real happiness in life to have nothing to do but what you like, and the greatest of all good things if you happen to like what does good to other people. My father, for example. He

never did a stroke of work in all his life, except what he liked best, and that was for everybody's good ; for it was smuggling from county Derry, the most lovely county in all the world, for an illicit still. My father's whisky was so good that all the magistrates and the clergy and the officers of the army used to buy it of him. So he lived for the good of his fellow-creatures, as he often used to say, before he went to confession ; and for all the sins he had to confess he might as well have stayed at home. But then, you see, it pleased the praste, who was, besides, his best customer."

They journeyed along the road according to their wont, and Myles was in the middle of another story when he stopped at sight of a group in the field at their right. Before the little knot of people stretched a great field of some fifty acres, on which there wandered, with all the dignity of lawful possessors of the soil, a troop of geese. Beyond the geese were the people.

"Myles," cried Jack excitedly, "look, look ; there's Mr. Bastable and Mrs. Bastable—and—and—look, if there isn't Captain Perrymont himself."

"Bastable it is," said Myles; "but who's the other man? Jack, we're in luck; for of all the men in the world, that's your own father's very best friend—that's Paul Bayliss. Don't you say never a word. You just follow me, and when the right time comes you step to the front while I say, 'Paul Bayliss, here's your old friend's son—here's little Jack Armstrong;' and then see what a reception you'll get. O mother of Moses!"

They hurried along the road till they came to a plank laid across the ditch that served for a bridge, and so got into the field. The party was at the far corner.

"Mrs. Bastable's got the hazel rod," said Jack. "That's what she used to do her hanky-panky with."

"What tricks are they up to now?" asked Myles, leading the way.

The woman's eyes had the fixed, trancelike expression that Jack remembered well, and she was standing with the rod in her hand just as she had done, though Jack did not remember this, on the day when the grand function of sorcery had been taken in hand. Round her were grouped the three—Bastable,

Captain Perrymont, and Paul Bayliss—all intently watching the woman, but with different expressions. Captain Perrymont had the air of one who is conducting a curious and scientific experiment; Bastable wore an anxious and expectant look; Paul Bayliss simply looked on, wondering.

Myles and Jack drew close to the hedge and looked on, but no one saw them.

"It's all nonsense, Captain Perrymont," said Bayliss, with an uneasy laugh as the rod began to twist and turn. "It's all part of your witchcraft nonsense that brings no luck to any one. Luck," he added bitterly, "whatever did bring luck to me?"

Just then Bastable held out his hand, and made a gesture to his wife.

"Captain Perrymont," he said, "you have seen the working of the hazel rod in your own ground. You may map it out yourself, and compare it with the map I made for you, at your own leisure. This is not your ground, I believe."

"No, it is mine," said Bayliss, "and a precious valuable property it is."

Bastable looked at him in a sharp, twinkling way.

"We shall see," he said, "we shall see. Meantime we will mark where we stopped the work."

He placed a stick in the ground, and in doing so saw Myles and Jack. With the slightest gesture possible, he placed his finger on his lips. At the same time he passed his hand across his wife's face, and, gently turning her round, ordered her to go home straight, and not to look behind her. Unlike the wife of Lot, Keziah Bastable obeyed meekly, and walked silently away, looking neither to the right nor to the left of her; so that she saw neither Jack nor Myles.

## CHAPTER XI.

THE woman gone, Mr. Bastable and the other two were left alone. Myles and the boy stood looking at them over the rails. It was a bright, warm afternoon ; the August sunshine lay like a robe of splendour upon the fields, bringing into clear relief every blade of grass, and painting every tuft of rank and useless weed as if it were a spray of silver-gilt set with diamonds. Beyond, the sea stretched, a sheet of grey-blue, with never a cloud to fleck the surface ; and beyond the sea a haze in which the sky-line and the water-line were lost. A lark was singing in the air. The voices of the men fell on Jack's ears like a dream. There was Mr. Bastable—why was he there ? There was his father's old friend—it was the first time that he realized the

fact of a father. He looked, and wondered what it all meant.

Paul Bayliss was the first to do anything. He kicked a turf at his feet, looked round, and cast a half glance at the two tramps, presumably father and son, who were standing by the road, and moved moodily off the field without the formality of a farewell to his companions.

"He doesn't know me," said Myles. "Wait till I go to him. Wait till I tell him, 'Paul Bayliss, here's the very boy as was born in the foundry that night when—you remember.' Only wait till then, Jack, and look to see the change as will come over Paul Bayliss."

But Jack had a good many years to wait before that day came.

Then Captain Perrymont, gathering himself together with an effort, as if he had been working out some mighty problem, spoke.

"Come up and see me to-morrow, Bastable. I doubt if it is worked correctly. Albertus Magnus will tell us, and we will look him up. The mesmeric power: it is the only secret. By that power the oracles spoke, the witches divined, the Rosicrucians learned everything,

saw everything, and knew everything. The Rosicrucians—Tell me, are you yourself a brother of the Rosy Cross ? ”

Bastable shook his head.

“ I fight for my own hand,” he said. “ And, besides, who knows better than you, Captain Perrymont, that the Fraternity is dead ? They’ve got a thing called a Rosicrucian Degree in Masonry. Bah ! Invented fifty years ago. Not even the elements of the Rosy Cross in it.”

“ There were three degrees,” the Captain went on. “ Three degrees, formerly, as there were three degrees of everything. In the first the candidate was lured on to explore the secrets of nature by the promise of the Philosopher’s Stone, the Elixir of Life, and the gifts of immortality and invisibility. When he came to the second he was told that the stone meant something very different, the elixir was a fable, and immortality to be read in a different sense. But he learned that the cultivation of nature’s secrets led to the improvement of mankind ! ”

“ Oh ! ” said Mr. Bastable, his face lengthening, “ was that all the Rosy Cross taught ? ”

Improve mankind ! ” he sneered. “ My business is to improve myself.”

“ Just so,” said the Captain. “ But then there was a third degree, to which none were admitted but those who were worthy.”

“ And what did they learn there ? ”

“ Well, my friend,” replied Captain Perrymont, turning a steady eye upon his companion, “ *should* you ever prove worthy, I may tell you the secrets of that degree.”

“ What are they talkin’ about at all, Jack ? ” said Myles, who was now sitting on the rails, listening, with a newly lit pipe in his mouth. “ Rosy Cross ? Maybe it’s the Gipsy’s patteran they mean. I’ll show it you any day where the Rommany folk have passed. I know their tricks and their ways.”

“ There have been men,” said Bastable, “ who knew how to transmute metals.”

The Captain shook his head.

“ No, it is a fable. Gold is gold, and lead is lead. Those who have pretended to the power were liars and quacks. Cagliostro, the mesmerist, pretended ; Pigard pretended ; Louis XIII. found, himself, a piece of gold in the crucible—but then, Pigard put it there.

When they wanted him to operate on a great scale, he made excuses till they grew tired and put him to death. Think no more of it, Bastable. You have a splendid power. Use it for the interests of humanity, and you will prosper. Use it for your own, and it will depart from you, to return no more."

The Captain, who had spoken with great solemnity, tucked his hands beneath his coat-tails and slowly walked away, his eyes turned earthward.

Left alone, Mr. Bastable began putting his instruments of sorcery together. First, he packed up the divining-rod; then he laid his little tubes of metal in order; then he took a long survey of the country; and, lastly, he strode across the field and saluted Myles.

"What are you doing here, Mr. Cuolahan?" he asked.

"Following my trade, like you, Mr. Bastable."

"And the boy with you. How are you, Jack? Ah! I shall never get another like him. Keep him innocent, Cuolahan, if you want him to be any good in the world."

This excellent moral advice was not based

on the usual grounds, because Mr. Bastable only regarded innocence from a commercial point of view, the spirits being, he thought, more accessible to innocent childhood.

"Then you shouldn't have frightened him and played your hanky on him, or he'd a been with you still."

"I wasn't frightened, Myles," said Jack.

"It was the spirruts," said Bastable. "What control have I over the spirruts? There's one at home now: answers to the name of Robert; pulls people by the hair. *I* don't ask them to the house; they come rapping, and invite themselves. Much good it has done me!" he ejaculated mournfully. "As for their messages, they're no use to anybody; they never put me on to a good thing; you can't coin a brass farthing out of what they tell you. Who cares how they *do* get on in the other world? What's the good of Peter telling me he's well and happy? As if I cared whether Peter was happy or not! If they know any secrets they keep them shut up safe for themselves. Yah! The spirruts indeed! Some people might feel honoured; I don't. You wait, and nothing

comes. Tot up all the time you spend on your *seances*, and see what profit you've got out of 'em. I wish I was quit of the whole business, I do."

"You forgot the grand hanky, when you put the boy in the circle and lit the lamps."

"Well, and it didn't hurt the boy, did it? What did you see, Jack?"

"I don't remember anything about it," said the boy.

"Well, then," replied the magician, "let's have another. Myles, I'll give you a sovereign for the loan of the boy for a night. We'll go to Squire Perrymont's tower, where he keeps his bottles and things. We'll get my wife along, too; and we'll have another Function."

"No, you don't," said Myles. "I am always for letting the good people alone. It's good luck, says the Irish, to speak well of 'em, and good luck to meet them; but it's bad luck to seek 'em, and it's the worst of all possible luck to find 'em when you do look for them. Paddy the Piper tould me himself."

"Well, well," answered Bastable; "but

look here, Cuolahan: if you won't lend me Jack, lend me yourself."

"What would I lend you meself for?"

"Half a sovereign and an hour or two with a spade."

Myles hesitated. He distrusted the man.

"It's none of your tricks—none of the good people's devilish work? God bless 'em all the same."

"As if I should ask *you* to help me in the magic!" returned Bastable, with contempt. "I want to dig, man; do you understand?—I want to dig?"

"Well, then, dig; who wants to prevent you? And what are you going to dig?"

"I don't know, rightly," Bastable replied, in a hesitating manner. "I don't quite know. It may be water, and it may be coal, and it may be—anything else. Go into the town and buy a spade, and come back here."

"Well—I'll come. What time do you want me?"

"Go straight into Esbrough—it's only half a mile. Leave the boy there behind you, and come back here. Stay; it's a moonlight night, and the sun sets at seven; come back about

sunset. You'll take the path by the shore, and bring a spade with you. We shall be quite alone here, and no one will see us."

Myles consented, though with misgivings of the supernatural, being at all times ready to diversify the monotony of life by any little adventure which might offer; and they separated.

Bastable returned to the field, where they saw him sit down on one of the tufts of rank grass, and pull out a book, which he fell to studying intently.

The road to Esbrough, half a mile or so away, led, after the field was passed, along the seashore. Myles and Jack were not professed admirers of the picturesque—and, indeed, if your walk in life necessitates a journey of sixteen or twenty miles a day, there very soon comes a time, even to a poet, when the flattest country is considered the most pleasant. It was flat enough immediately round Esbrough. As for the shore, it was not quite what summer tourists would choose for the site of a watering-place. One likes a shore which has a certain amount of determination, crispness, and character in it.

There was nothing crisp at all about the sea-shore near Esbrough. It was a large, wide inlet; what the geography books, in their sweet poetical way, call an "arm of the sea," into which there flowed a river. Some books, in fact, showed their superior knowledge by calling it Esbrough-on-Avon, though the Avon was a good ten miles higher up, and the water that washed those sedgy shores was as salt as any to be found outside the Dead Sea. The waves did not come rolling in, with those long breakers, edged with a silver fringe; those waves rearing their crests like proud horses; those billows that run up the shingly shore, kissing it with the fervour of a bridegroom—which delight the poetic mind. Quite the contrary. They came creeping up slowly, as if they were ashamed of themselves. When it was low tide, there was first a long stretch of sand, and then a long stretch of mud. As the tide rose, the mud first disappeared; then the fat red lug-worms, its occupants, rejoiced, and came out to congratulate each other and talk about the weather. Presently they were annoyed that they had not stopped in the cool cavernous retreats of the slimy mud,

because the eels came out too, and ate them up. Later on, perhaps retribution, in the shape of a fork, seized the eels, though this was not so certain to happen. As the tide came higher, it made rivers and lakes in the sand, and looked almost sparkling in the sunshine. Sometimes the boys came down and bathed. The treacherous ocean, smiling just as usual, made its arrangements to meet this contingency, converting the dry sands into quicksands, which swallowed up the boys alive, and then they were as sorry as the eels and the lug-worms. The sand all covered up, there remained the rushes and rank seaside grasses, in which the ox-birds made their nests, and where the wild ducks hid, if anybody—which was a rare occurrence—happened to be about with a gun. When the tide was higher than usual, the birds had their nests drowned out; and then they, in their turn, abused the ocean. Ox-birds possess that instinct of nature which leads them to recognise the daily ebb and flow of the tide, but unfortunately does not go far enough to make them provide against an occasional spring tide. Nature has been very kind in bestowing

her instincts and means of self-preservation. Somehow, she never seems to have gone far enough. The hedgehog is generally considered a happy animal as regards fortification, but I have seen a terrier turn him inside out with a dexterous insertion of his foot in the weak point of his armour : it does not quite meet all round. The poor little hare has teeth ; but they are a sorry set, after all. The cow's tail was designed to whisk off the flies ; but it is not long enough to reach farther than the shoulder. All Nature's designs seem to me to be symbolised by the cow's tail. They are admirable ; they are perfect illustrations of benevolence, far-seeing, widespread ; but they do not reach far enough. It seems, to thinkers like King Alphonso of Castile—the philosopher who thought he could improve on the construction of the universe—as if, having started with such beautiful intentions, Nature should have either made the cow's tail longer, or abolished the flies altogether : the latter for choice.

Myles walked on in silence, thinking over his interview with the clergyman. “ Let him have the boy ! ” And what good could he

himself do with him, or for him? He had seen, for the first time in his life, the exquisite orderliness of an English gentleman's house, where everybody was well behaved, and everything was well kept. Would it not be better for the boy if some one would take him in hand, and bring him up and give him a start in life? He thought of Cardiff Jack and the begging-letter; and then he thought of his own hand-to-mouth life, and what might become of Jack if anything happened to himself.

"And little Norah going to be a lady, too!" he said aloud.

Jack looked at him wonderingly.

"Did I speak, Jack? I was thinking of you."

"What of me, Myles?"

"Something the old gentleman said last night and this morning. Say, Jack, would you like to be made a gentleman?"

Jack reflected.

"You don't know what it is, I suppose. There's many kinds of gentlemen. There's them that eat and drink, and smoke, and ride horses, and think about nothing but their own pleasures. That's one kind. But

there's a better kind, my boy, a better kind. There's gentlemen that read and learn when they are young, and when they get older use their learning and their money trying to make the world better. They don't always succeed much, because they want to drive us, and we won't be drove ; but they try. Father Mathew was one of them gentlemen, Jack, though he was a praste . . . . Jack, you don't know, because you're young and strong, and you misremember the trouble that I brought on you before I met the Father . . . you don't know the wickedness and misery that's in the world. It's all alike, in the city and in the country, but it's worse in the city. And what is it done it, I say ? Jack, 'tis drink ! —'tis drink ! In the courts of the old town—wait till you've seen London !—where you can hardly breathe in the rooms, and the decent women ought not to live a day, the people get good wages, and spend them all in drink—all, Jack ! And so they are slaves to the taverns, and the pawnbrokers are their masters. 'Tis the curse ! 'tis the curse of the country ! And no one to lift a voice but a son of the soil. There's the clergy—they're a good sort, and

charitable, but they can't see beyond the length of their noses ; and they won't do nothing unless they can manage it in their own way, and be the head of it. Perhaps you'll say there's the doctor, Jack. The day will come when the doctors will speak ; but, Lord ! they daren't—they daren't—and nobody daren't ! The life and the pluck of the country is being drained out of it. It isn't like what it used to be when they lived in the open, and walked and ran. Now they're shut up in the factories, and work the machines. Jack !—Jack ! ”

“ Why, Myles ! ”

For the man, started on his favourite topic, was swinging his arms backwards and forwards, striding along at such a rate that the boy had to run, pouring out his words with a fierce excitement, and gathering strength for a prophetic denunciation of drink.

“ Why, Myles ! ”

He stopped and laughed.

“ I am a fool when I get upon drink, Jack. It's all true for you, ivery word. What was I saying ? Well, sometimes I think that I should like to make you another Father Mathew.”

" What am I to do then, Myles ? "

The talk was a little over Jack's head, and Myles turned the conversation upon the more amusing topic of Ireland, which was, to Jack's imagination, a wild land as full of adventure as the island of Armenia to the Seven Champions.

" I'll tell you," said Myles, " how my father cured his rheumatiz. He was sitting by the fireside, doubled up with it, and groaning, for he'd been out shooting with James M'Geoghegan, next door — the same who keeps the hardware shop—and he'd caught cold. And thin came a beggar-woman to the door and looks in.

" ' In the name of God,' she says, ' who's that groanin' ? '

" ' It's my husband,' says my mother.

" ' God help us all ! and what's the matter wid him ? '

" ' He's got pains here, and pains there, and pains all over his poor body.'

" The old woman looked round the house. In the corner stood a great tub full of cowld wather, the same that they used for steepin' the linen.

“ ‘ Do what I bid ye,’ says she. ‘ Persuade him that he’s going to have a hot bath, and drop him in it in the name of God.’

“ ‘ It’s a quare medicine,’ said my mother, ‘ but we’ll try it.’

“ We tried it. We stripped him and told him the bath was ready, and, with the help of a neighbour, me and mother dropped him in, and then ran for our lives. I heard nothing but an awful yell, as he shuffled out of the tub.

“ ‘ Yer sowl to blazes ! ’ he screamed. ‘ I’m scalded intirely ! ’ He thought, ye see, that the water was hot. And the rheumatiz niver had a chance, and went straight away and niver came back.”

“ Tell me about the Repalers, Myles.”

Jack used the Irish pronunciation of the word through ignorance, not for chaff. Myles was gradually losing his accent, save when he told the stories of his childhood. As he had always been accustomed to talk of Repale, and had never investigated the etymology of the word, he preserved the custom. New locutions —that is, those learned in England—he mostly pronounced after the English manner, with a

certain richness of accent, a full, sonorous utterance of the vowels that belongs peculiarly to Ireland. An Irishman always speaks as if the mere passage of the words through his lips were a physical enjoyment in itself, like that of drinking port. I do not profess to understand ethnical differences, or to account for them, but I boldly advance this as a fact, and leave it to the Anthropological Society in St. Martin's Place, whose room is so beautifully decorated with skulls, to account for it; and, as the lady said when she found the lock of hair in the egg, "if they can account for that they can account for anything."

Jack had reason to remember the road between Paul Bayliss's field and the town. On the left the tide was running out, so that the sand was left bare, and the mud was beginning to show. It was a bright, hot day; the sun fell on the sails of the craft which were slowly working up the "arm of the sea" above mentioned—potato-luggers, fishing-smacks, small vessels which traded with Esbrough, where there was a creek with a tiny wharf visited by these small vessels and nothing else. Far off, the pathless plain of

the ocean, placid and motionless, of a grey-blue, seemed to be waiting for the ships which in a few years were to furrow its surface, and sail from Esbrough to the uttermost parts of the earth. But the fortune of Esbrough was not yet made.

On the right of the road lay a wide ditch, into which there flapped from time to time a water-rat, with a vicious plunge which meant undying hatred of the human race. Why water-rats so distrust mankind, what traditions they nourish, what memories they keep green among themselves, I know not. Trout may be tickled ; the salmon takes the fly, and then, entering into the full measure of the sport, makes his run, pretends to sulk, and suffers himself to be landed ; the tiger and the bear fall into the pit ; the little cockyolly bird is taken in the net. Yet these never grow wiser. It is only the water-rat who remembers things practised on his ancestors, and refuses to listen to the voice of the hunter, charming though it be.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE road left the shore with a sharp and unexpected turn, where a creek, down which the receding tide was rushing like the Severn at Portskewet, broke the straight line of coast and ran southward.

“There is Esbrough,” said Myles. “Now, Jack, hold up your head, for it’s the town where your fathers belong to. See, yon’s the tower of Esbrough Church. Wait till I take you there! There’s the roof of the market; many’s the time I’ve whistled about there, waiting for the evening and Johnny Armstrong. Give me the bundle, boy. Jack Armstrong ought not to enter Esbrough with a travelling hawker at all; an’ if he does, he mustn’t carry a bag in his hands—give it to me.”

They passed along the road where the cottages gradually changed into low terraces of the humbler kind; where the terraces became sprinkled with shops; and so into the High Street of Esbrough town.

Twelve years since Myles had seen it last. Twelve years since the sturdy, curly haired boy at his side was carried, a helpless baby, out of the place where he had escaped destruction as narrowly as Lot. Twelve years since the flames of poor Johnny Armstrong's home-stead lit up the Christmas sky. Myles looked round. There was very little change. One or two more chimneys showing where a new scrap-iron foundry had been put up; a little more activity in the streets: otherwise the same dull north-country town it had always been. The thriving iron trade in the neighbouring town of Coalingford threw out tendrils here and there, some of which struck Esbrough, causing it to make feeble efforts at creating a trade. None of these had yet succeeded; Paul Bayliss, one of the unsuccessful, represented his brother venturers in gloom and despondency. The shopkeepers stood at their doors; the country-folk lounged at the inn

doors; a solitary wagon rumbled along the cobbled street; and a single pony-carriage was standing before a draper's shop. A sleepy town: a town where afternoon seemed the fittest time of the day to visit it; a town without interest and without history.

"Wait," said Myles, "wait till I take ye to the church!"

He led the way to the Pack-Horse, the inn which he remembered at whose doors, on the Christmas eve when Jack was born, he had stood with Johnny Armstrong.

There was a new landlord, who knew him not. Myles was disappointed. The place which had looked so friendly became cold. But he stepped inside and ordered dinner, making it a sumptuous meal by way of greeting for Jack to the old town.

It was about four o'clock when he led the boy to the church. It was an old thirteenth-century edifice, with a square tower to which no steeple had ever been added. A church with windows of rich stained glass, with flying buttresses, quaint gargoyles, a peal of bells, and a great churchyard lying around it, piled high with graves and mouldering monuments.

The church stood on a little hill, and from its porch you looked out over the roofs of the Esbrough houses to the sea in front and a long stretch of green land on either side.

The church door was open, because it was Saturday evening and they were preparing for the Sunday services. Myles took the boy into the building. It was the first time he had ever been in a church.

In the chancel was a monument of a knight with crossed legs; in a niche knelt a figure in stone; monumental slabs stood upon the walls; beneath the window in the east there ran a long inscription in Latin; beneath the organ-gallery in the west there ran an inscription in English.

"Look round you, boy," said Myles, almost solemnly. "Where you stand," he went on, "the Armstrongs is buried; where they lies buried, there they reigned. Read me now. What does that say?" He pointed to the organ-loft.

"Erected and beautified by John Armstrong, A.D. 1692."

"Good. And now read that, under the painted glass."

It was in queer character, the like of which the boy had never seen.

"I can't read that, Myles."

"No more can't I, Jack," he responded cheerfully. "But I know what it is. It says that John Armstrong put up that window in memory of Dame Eleanor his wife. I know all the monuments. I've been here half a dozen times with poor Johnny. He used to come here and cry when he thought how rich he might have been. See that stone image, with his nose knocked off, praying in the corner?—that's Sir John Armstrong, Knight, slain at the battle of Flodden Field. See that soldier with his legs crossed?—that's Sir John Armstrong as he came back from the Crusades. When his hands was on him it was a spakin' likeness. Look at all the slabs upon the wall—what are they but John Armstrong—John Armstrong? Them's your ancestors, Jack, my boy. Now you know why I tould you to lift your head high and stick out your chin, bekase we were coming to your own place. Maybe," he went on with a shudder, not being accustomed to the religious gloom of old churches; "maybe there's the

ghosts of all the Armstrongs about us at the present. They're come to look at you, Jack. You're the last of the lot. Come out now, and I'll show you where your father and your mother is buried, both together. All that there was of him, poor Johnny."

The tombstone erected by Paul Bayliss stood at the north end of the chancel, in the churchyard. A blackberry bush and a rose-tree grew over it, throwing long arms over the grave and hiding the inscription on the stone. Myles beat them down with his stick.

"Now, Jack; read that."

The boy read, with a strange new feeling upon him :

Sacred to the Memory  
OF  
JOHN ARMSTRONG,  
WHO DIED DECEMBER 24, 1848, AGED 30;  
AND OF  
SUSAN, HIS WIFE,  
WHO DIED THE SAME NIGHT, AGED 24.

"Ay," said Myles. "It was good of Paul Bayliss. To-morrow we'll go and see him. There's your father and your mother, and you niver saw neither. Now, Jack, give me your

hand—so: Stand on the top of your own father's tombstone, and tell me what you see."

"Fields, Myles; and roofs of houses, and the sea."

"The fields belonged to the Armstrongs. Ay! and do still," he added, with an Irishman's belief in the inalienable nature of land. "Just as Pettigo belongs to the Cuolahans in spite of the Earl of Enniskillen. Yours, Jack—if everybody had his rights. The houses stand where there used to be more fields belonging to the Armstrongs. And even the sea's yours by right, because the Armstrongs had the fishing. Take a good look round, Jack."

He lifted the boy to the ground.

"A gentleman, boy, by birth. And that's better than any other kind of gentleman, because you can't make him nor train him. Remember that always. A gentleman, Jack."

Jack's notions of a gentleman, like his idea of a prince, were considerably confused. But Myles's admonition had an effect. He never forgot the Armstrongs in the church, or the broad expanse of the Armstrong estates as seen from the old churchyard. The experience of this day bore its fruit in the after years.

As they returned through the town Jack caught Myles by the arm.

"Look, Myles, look! There's Cardiff Jack."

Myles looked, and saw a man, bent and stooping, making off as fast as his legs would carry him.

"That's not Cardiff Jack, boy," he said. "Cardiff Jack's never got so low as to be gridling on the main drag—singing, I mean, on the high-road. Cardiff Jack's a gentleman."

Remembering Myles's last advice, never to forget that he himself was a gentleman, the boy felt his power of defining what some people have called that "grand old Saxon word," gentleman, grow less and less. He was to be a gentleman; all the Armstrongs had been gentlemen: Captain Cardiff was a gentleman who wrote lying letters, and got prison for his reward. Was he, then, to imitate Captain Cardiff? He put the problem behind him, and waited for further information.

"But it was Captain Cardiff, Myles," he persisted. "I saw him look up, and he knew us; and then he turned round and ran away."

"Well, if it was," said Myles, "very likely

there will be a fight. I'm not afraid of Cardiff Jack any day."

Then he remembered his appointment, and prepared to keep it.

"Let me go part of the way with you," Jack asked.

They set out, Myles buying a spade at the nearest shop, on the road by which they had entered the town. The sun was low now, but there was still an hour of daylight left when they struck upon the lonely road along the sea-shore which led to the place of assignation.

"'Tis a wild spot, isn't it?" said Myles. "A place to murder your enemy in, and no one to know anything about it—see now—and throw him in the ditch. Did I ever tell you of the Black Piper of Pettigo? Wait, then, till you're a bit older, Jack, when I'll let you have the most bloodthirsty story in all Ireland. Don't come any further. Go away back to the town, and take your book and a candle, and a bit of supper, and go to bed. I've got an hour's job for that prince of sinners and devil-raisers, Bastable."

Jack turned obediently, and began his way back to the town, singing, as was his wont

whenever he was alone. I think his songs were not remarkable for correctness of air, because they were picked up anyhow; nor were they accommodated with the proper words, because he learned one half and made up the rest; but they were as true to time as the trill of the blackbird or the jug-jug of the nightingale. Heaven makes us singing birds, or silent birds—sometimes cawing, discordant birds; and whether we are taught or not, we sing according to our gifts, with what voices we have.

The boy marched along in step with the jolly song he was trolling forth, swinging his limbs, sometimes running and jumping, always with the face of high resolve which was as yet only prophetic, because he was not old enough to have resolved anything. Perhaps David had such a face in the early days upon the slopes of Judah, while he sat upon the hill-side, looking down upon the Wady where Jesse had his vineyards, while the lion which he killed lurked in the rocks at his feet, and tried to make up his mind whether it was worth while to rob the flock and slay the shepherd. With the lion, taking counsel, was his friend

the bear, as may be read ; and between them they made a mess of it. Now David, as we know, like little Jack, was a boy “ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to.”

Jack’s eyes were not so sharp, nor his ears so keen, as to hear footsteps behind them as he came down from the town with Myles. Nor did he know that the man whom he had pointed out to the pedlar was creeping after them, half hiding under the hedge, and keeping so far behind as just to hold them in sight and no more. Nor, when he turned and left Myles just past the corner of the road, did he notice the man duck his head and hide where an empty, half-ruined hut gave him an opportunity.

Along the middle of the road came the boy, singing lustily. In the shingle hut, which had been put up for the accommodation of the coastguard, but which was now roofless, crouched a figure watching the child through a hole in the wooden wall. A figure in rags, barefooted, looking half famished and wholly broken down ; his fingers clutched nervously the handle of a thick tramp’s stick ; his legs

were gathered up under his body, in an attitude of expectancy, ready for a spring ; his face was the face of Cardiff Jack, but strangely altered for the worse since last we saw it. His cheeks were fallen, and his eyes were bloodshot ; the innumerable crow's-feet might have been multiplied a hundredfold, so seamy and spider-webbed with lines was he ; his lips were trembling, not with passion, but with that nervous affection which sometimes rewards the steady tippler. For Mr. Cardiff was down upon his luck. He had worked out his six months with infinite disgust, missing the little creature-comforts of life, and the agreeable society to which he had been accustomed. And on emerging from his cell, he found that everything went wrong with him. Three short months of bad luck, and drink, brought the once gallant Captain Cardiff—almost as famous in his way as Claude Duval—to the condition of a tramp singing a psalm along the street for coppers. That was the result of Jack's information. His present misery was due to the boy : and now—now—after many days, the opportunity was come, and the boy was within his grasp. The immoral

crust which lay about the Captain's better nature had not been softened by prison discipline : the words of the chaplain fell on soil as arid as the slopes of Sinai : Mr. Cardiff was a worse man, not a better, for his six months of gaol. In the long hours of solitude he only felt how his conviction would sap his credit with the "profession," and destroy his prestige ; he only longed for some opportunity, like the present, to meet the boy, alone with him alone—*solus cum solo*—and have it out. He was disgraced—not in the eyes of the world, for which he cared nothing, but in the eyes of his friends, the rogues inferior to himself because they lacked his superior luck, audacity, and cunning. He might, some day, have revenge.

And the day was come. With an empty pocket, with a heart full of rage, he was grinding out his miserable psalm along the street, when before him, unexpected and unhoped for, stood Myles and Jack. He sneaked round corners watching them ; not hoping to do more than follow and track them down. He crept out after them along the road ; he saw Myles dismiss the boy ; and

he hid in the house, with his pulses beating, impatient of his vengeance.

But as yet he did not know how to take it. Revenge is a thing that sometimes disappoints one. You may kill, you may torture your enemy ; but the deed once done, it is over for him, and you yourself feel just as angry as before. That is the worst of it. Cardiff Jack wanted, in some wild way, to make the boy feel the mischief he had done ; to make him participate in his own sufferings ; and he could not, in these few moments of reflection, think how this was to be done. However, there was not much time for doubt. The boy passed the hut, suspecting nothing. Suddenly he heard a footstep, and a sort of rush upon him from behind, as with a roar, like a wild beast, the injured letter-writer sprang upon him and dragged him backwards to the ground.

When Jack turned up his eyes, as he was lying flat on his back along the road, with those two fierce hands clutching at his arms, he discovered that he was in the hands of Mr. Cardiff, and clearly perceived that a thrashing,

at least, was going to happen to him—probably a very superior thrashing. So he remarked, as if he was not in the least anxious about it—

“ I told Myles you were in the town. He will be back here presently ; so you had better make haste and let me go.”

The man only hissed ; he was in such a rage that he could not even swear. At intervals, words not found in dictionaries, and the fragments of words apparently used in a perverted sense, fell from his lips, like the pearls from those of the young lady in the fable. But Jack had heard many such words in his life, and was little moved by them.

“ Let me go ! ” he repeated, trying to get away. But the man’s fingers held him like a vice.

“ Let you go ? ” cried Mr. Cardiff, in a hoarse, unnatural voice. “ Let you go ? When I’ve murdered you ! when I’ve torn the flesh off your bones—when I’ve wrung your neck—when I’ve broken your ribs—when I’ve smashed your skull—when I’ve put out your eyes ! Let you go ? I’ll roast you to death at a slow fire—I’ll boil you and scald you—I’ll tear you with pincers—I’ll lock you

up and cut you to pieces bit by bit—I'll——” Here his voice failed him again, and he fell back upon those fragments of words above referred to, which in their entirety are the household parlance of half the English-speaking race. It must be understood that, out of respect for the memory of Captain Cardiff, now deceased, we have purposely omitted the garnish and ornament with which he set off these short and pithy sentences.

He dragged the boy to his feet, holding him still with one hand, while with the other, in a feeble sort of way, for his wrath made him purposeless, he dabbed him about the head and face. Jack looked up and down the road. There was no one—not a soul in sight; only, far out to sea, the smoke of a passing steamer; only the cry of wild-fowl in the air; only the lapping of the waves upon the shore.

“ No one to see us,” said his captor. “ No one to hear you when you scream. So you needn’t look.”

“ I shall not scream,” said Jack quietly.

“ You won’t? We shall see. Scream now!”

He struck him violently with his fist on the

face, so that the blood spouted from the child's nose, but he uttered no cry.

"Scream ! You shall scream so that you are heard for ten miles round. You shall scream so that this night shall be remembered in all the country as the night of Cardiff Jack's revenge. Ay ! If I swing for it, I will murder you. Then all mean creeping spies and informers shall tremble when they read of it—Captain Cardiff's revenge. How to do it—how to do it!"

Jack thought it best to hold his tongue. After all, it is not for the victim to suggest his own torture, but rather to pray that some of the fiercer forms may be forgotten. Isaac of York, no doubt, when his teeth were pulled out, remembered how the king's gridiron had been employed in cooking living steaks, and found consolation in the thought.

"How to do it!" The man was mad for the time ; he was mad with the desire for revenge, with the memory of privation, with the drink that was in his veins : he was mad, and had it occurred to him to beat out the boy's brains there and then, there would have been an end of this novel, and only a chapter

in the Newgate Calendar. But it did not occur to him; what he was thinking about was to find some means of torturing the boy to death; some subtle mode of refined cruelty, for Mr. Cardiff was no common ruffian, which should gratify his revenge, slowly, slowly, and prolong the agonies of the little villain who had wrought him all this evil.

"There's a place," he said at last, as if speaking to himself; "there's a place, half a mile away from here or so, where there's a little bay. There's no boat ever sails in that bay, and no man, woman, or child that ever comes nigh that spot at night. And there's something there that will do for me. I slept there last night under a tree, and I saw what you shall feel. There's no one to see us, and Myles Cuolahan, when he passes this way home, will hear your screams and wonder where they were. In the morning, when you are dead, I shall bury you there, and no one will ever learn where you died or what became of you. And then I shall prosper. Come."

Jack went with him, knowing how useless it was to resist, but with a sinking heart. At

least he would not scream ; but what was to be done to him ?

The sun was getting lower, and as they turned east the black rack of clouds lowered heavily before his eyes, and all the brightness went out of the world and out of the boy's heart. And yet he neither trembled, nor begged for mercy, nor spoke a single word of fear, as he marched manfully along to his fate, as bravely as ever revolutionist marched out to Satory to be shot, or aristocrat sat in the tumbril waiting his turn.

" When you are dying, little devil," said Mr. Cardiff cheerfully, " you can think of the letter that you delivered for me, and the message that you gave with it. You will say to yourself, So ought all informers to be served. And you will wish you had it to do all over again, when you would do it all over again very differently."

It was a weak sort of speech for an intending murderer to make, but there are times of great emotion when words spring up to our lips like the bubbles on boiling water, meaning nothing, and of no use, except to show the excitement that rages below. Jack, whose

knowledge of human nature was naturally inferior to that of his historian, took the mildness of the speech for a change in the speaker's intentions, and congratulated himself for the moment on the favourable alteration of his captor's sentiments.

Meantime the man was dragging the boy through a gap in the hedge, and across a sea-side field like that where Mr. Bastable had been surveying with a rod the day before. A field without a path on it; a wide stretch of green, rank and tufted, and near the shore sloppy and muddy. It was separated by little ditches full of stagnant black water, where efts and such creatures are found, and by broken-down rails. There were no hedges; there was no house in sight; there was no sign of life; there were no trees—only a hundred yards or so inland stood a row of trees bent and blown all in one direction by the prevalent sea-breeze, while on a little hillock before them was a plantation of black firs. Their way lay eastward; the long line of hills before the boy's eyes looked black and dreary, the bank of cloud behind their crest grew every moment darker, heavier, and more threatening.

The man muttered to himself, staggering sometimes as if from weakness, but it was from passion. He held the boy firmly by the shirt-collar and jacket, but offered no further violence for the present. His lips moved as if they were in silent communion with his soul, as indeed they were ; and his fingers, ever and anon, took a tighter grasp of the boy's shoulders.

When they came to a ditch the man took the child in his arms and jumped over with him ; when they came to a paling he carried the boy while he stepped over it ; never leaving hold of him for one minute. And Jack's courage fell lower and lower as they receded further from the road and the place grew more and more silent and solitary.

Presently Jack saw some object before him standing out against the sky, a queer thing, seeming in the evening light to be some giant animal on its back, holding up long arms, a dozen or more, against the sky. It was immediately in front of the little hillock crowned with pines that this strange thing lay. The sea made a sharp, unexpected little gulf here by the aid of a low tongue of land. The sand

ran nearly to the foot of the pines. Beyond the sand, of course, was the mud. And the strange thing was lying in the mud.

Seeing it, Captain Cardiff gave a shout of triumph.

"We're coming to it, little devil," he growled. "We're coming to it, at last. And now you shall see what it is to offend Jack Cardiff."

It was a sedgy, dreary shore which lay round the little bay; a shore on which the reedy grass grew in patches quite close to the line of weed—not real, honest seaweed, green and bright, smelling of ozone and lying piled in masses of twisted ribbons, mixed with sand and shells and the backbones of cuttle-fish, such as we see on the south coast and at the back of the Isle of Wight; but a mixture of black mud and grey-green weed, in which foul worms crept and sea-slugs found a temporary home; weed where the wild ducks came to look for food, and found it in the foolish worms and slugs. The fringe of weed lay close to the patches of grass and below a cliff of at least a foot high; and beyond the weed was spread the mud: beyond the mud you saw the

bright waters of the German Ocean creeping slowly upwards as the tide was rising.

And on the shore Mr. Cardiff sat down and heaved a mighty sigh.

“At last!” he said. “Boy and devil, in the prison where you sent me I made a vow. I swore that I would follow you. I took a solemn oath on the Bible that they left in my cell that I would have revenge, sooner or later. I’ve found it sooner. Now, you’ve got to die.”

Jack answered nothing, only he remembered his word—that nothing should make him scream, and braced his little heart for the worst; for now he saw that it was a grim reality, and that the man meant the worst that he could do.

“It’s come sooner than I expected,” said Mr. Cardiff—“much sooner. Now sit down, and pull off my boots.”

This surprising commencement of a violent death so astonished Jack that he only stared.

“Sit down, I say. No; kneel down, and pull off my boots.”

The boy knelt down and unlaced his captor’s boots, a work which, owing to the complica-

tion of knots, and the intermixture of leather and string, took him some time. However, Mr. Cardiff seemed in no hurry, sitting in patience, only looking to see that the work was really under weigh, until it was finished.

He wore, perhaps from caprice—English gentlemen are apt to be eccentric—no stockings at all.

“Tuck up my trousers,” he said, “as high as they will go.”

Jack dutifully rolled them up—they were a loose and ill-fitting pair—till they reached to a foot or so above the knees. It is a remarkable fact that in after life the sight of a man’s bare leg, even if it was as well shapen as that of Mr. Cardiff’s, always gave him a disagreeable feeling, as if some one was reviving an unpleasant recollection.

“There’s a leg!” said Mr. Cardiff complacently, smiting the right member with the hollow of his hand. “There’s the leg, you little devil, that you shut up in prison for six months. And those are the feet—handsomer feet never walked—that had to take exercise in a prison-yard. Do you think you will ever have such a leg and such a

foot? Never, because you are going to die. Perhaps you don't know what that means? You'll soon find out. And all the time you're dying just you think, only you just say to yourself, 'It serves me d— well right, 'cos I got Captain Cardiff, the best and foremost of all the letter-writers in England, six months' quod.' And now I think we're 'most ready. Stay. Go down on your knees to me and say after me. Kneel down, I say."

Jack knelt.

"Say, 'Captain Cardiff—noble Captain Cardiff, king of the begging letter-writers.' "

Jack repeated.

"I repent, and am very sorry—"

"I repent, and am very sorry—"

"That by word or deed, by act or speech—"

"That by word or deed, by act or speech—"

"I got you six months' quod—"

"I did not get you sixty years' quod."

Mr. Cardiff started to his feet with a surprise that, but for the determination in his breast, might have led to milder counsels. As it was, he swore an oath as great as any

that William Rufus, or even a Californian, ever set his lips to—an oath so full, so round, so blasphemous, that not even the gravity of the occasion could justify it. It was more than equal to the subject: like the duty of the Marlborough master, it was overdone, and smacked of priggishness. Yet, to those who knew the man, there was nothing of unreality or affectation in it. Mr. Cardiff, on the occasion of the greatest surprise in his whole life, simply employed the biggest oath that he possessed. That once discharged, he relapsed, after the manner of inferior artists, into numerous commonplace damns. And then, for he had never once let the boy go, even when he was pulling off his boots, he turned him round face to face with the queer thing that he had noticed on the way.

“Look there, boy,” he said, with a certain grandeur, “see your grave.”

It did not look like Jack’s idea of a grave, being the wreck, consisting of rib-bones and a bit of keel, of an old coaling craft that had got washed up into the bay some dark night many years before, and now lay, sticking in the mud with its ribs held up aloft, waiting

till time and the waves should separate the upright timbers from the keel. The decks were all gone, and the poop and the bows; and there was nothing left at all, save the frame and the keel.

“I slept here last night,” said Mr. Cardiff, rubbing his foot meditatively, which he had struck upon a sharp reed—“I slept here last night because I had lost my way, and because I had no money if I found it. I slept beneath those trees, and I watched the tide come up in the moonlight. First it covered all the mud, and then it covered the old keel there; and then it climbed up the ribs slowly—little devil, slowly—and then it covered them too. I lay and watched. I was cold, and I had no drink, no tobacco, no covering. Through you I was hungry—through you; and when I went to sleep, I had a dream. I dreamed that I was here with you, just as I am now; and the tide was rising, just as it is now; and the moon was shining, just as it will be presently; and that I was doing with you just what I am doing now.”

He threw the boy, who made no kind of resistance, over his shoulder, and stepped out

upon the sand first, and then into the mud. The wreck lay a hundred yards out, and the mud was more than knee-deep; so that it took a long time to wade through it. It was reached at last, and, mounting on the sunken keel, which lay a foot or more deep in the black mud, Mr. Cardiff set to work. Close to his hand stood the shortest rib of any, a piece of bent oak, from which some one—a passing labourer, perhaps—had sawn the upper part, leaving about eight feet of wood. Where it bent round, a large nail, red and rusty, projected some six inches. Mr. Cardiff took the unresisting boy, and placed him with his back against the wood, so that he faced the land, one of his feet supported by the nail. Then he drew from his trousers pocket a piece of string, good stout whip-cord.

"Lucky I had this, little devil," he murmured. "If I hadn't thought of this bit o' string, I might have had to brain you. This is a much better way, this is."

He tied the cord round the boy's body, running it round and round, leaving only his arms free, and binding his feet, so that he had no power of moving them at all. When

he was tied up so tight, secured with so many knots, that there was no chance at all of his being able to move, he stepped back upon the mud. As his weight left the keel, the poor old wreck gave a sensible lurch. The mud was softer, because the tide was rising, and the man's movements on the wreck disturbed the settlement of years.

Then the ruffian boxed the boy's ears. It was the last outrage, and it seemed the most cruel. If the tears stood in the boy's eyes, if his cheek was pale, if his mouth quivered, his steady gaze never dropped, nor did his courage fail, nor did he scream.

"I now," said Mr. Cardiff, "step ashore. You will see me, if you turn your head, sit down on the shore, and light my pipe. Presently you will feel the water flowing round your feet. Then it will reach to your knees. I shall be looking on all the time. Then you will feel it mount higher and higher, but you will not be able to move. After two or three hours, you will feel it round your neck. I shall be looking on all the time, for there will be a fine moon to-night. Then you will begin to scream, and I shall laugh.

You won't scream very long, for the water will mount over your face and drown you, drown you, drown you, and I shall be there to see."

And saying this, the miserable man plunged again into the mud, and waded back to shore, leaving Jack tied to the beam, awaiting his fate.

END OF VOL. I.

















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